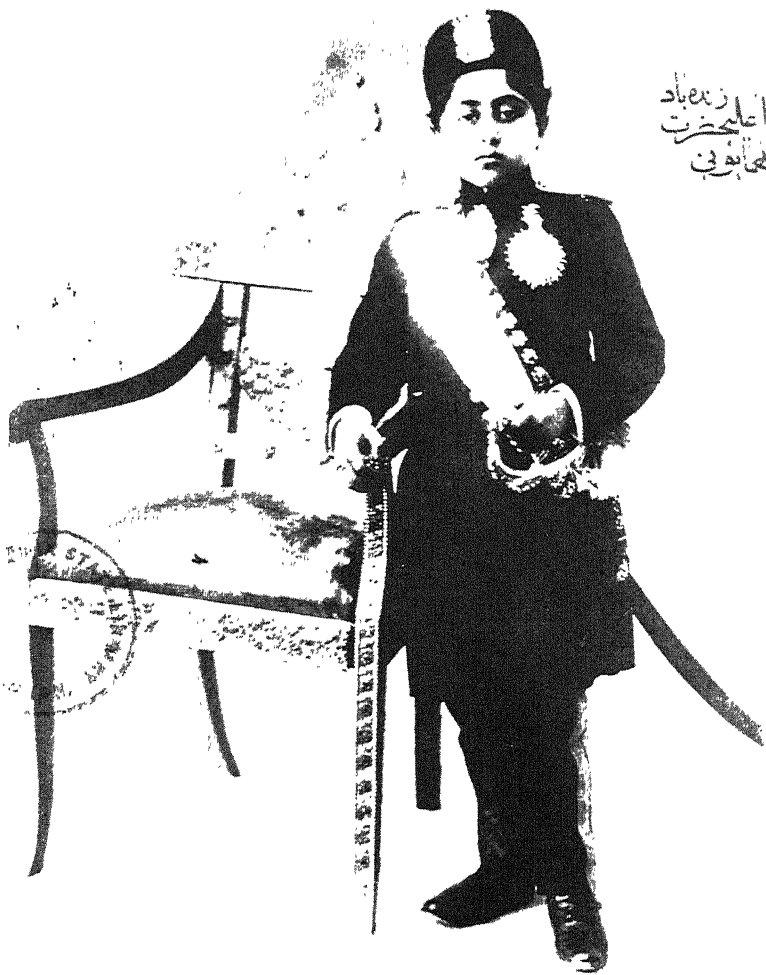


# PERSIA AND ITS PEOPLE

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THE YOUNG SHAH OF PERSIA



# PERSIA AND ITS PEOPLE

BY

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WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS

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## PREFACE

THIS book is the result of two visits to Persia, extending over a period of about three years, during which I had considerable opportunities of travel and of mixing with the inhabitants.

It was written with the idea of giving a popular description of Iran, but at the same time I have striven to be accurate, and where I could not rely on my personal knowledge I gratefully own my obligation to the works of Mr. Benjamin, Professor E. G. Browne, Lord Curzon, Sir C. Markham, Sir W. Muir, Professor W. Jackson, Sir L. Pelly, and Major Sykes among others.

I have been particularly fortunate in having had the benefit of the criticism of Sir Mortimer Durand, formerly H.B.M.'s Minister at Tehran, his advice having been most valuable.

Besides this, Major Sykes, Miss Bird, and two Persian gentlemen have supplied useful information; Mr. H. R. Sykes has kindly allowed me to avail myself of his large collection of photographs, and other illustrations are by Mr. Bourke and M. Sevraguine, of Tehran.

I have tried to give a truthful picture of Persia as it is, dwelling chiefly on those aspects which may be of interest to the general reader, and my principal difficulty has been to compress all that I wanted to say within the limits of a single volume.

If the public finds half as much pleasure in reading my book as I have had in writing it I shall be more than rewarded.

ELLA C. SYKES

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SOME DESCRIPTION OF PERSIA . . . . .	I
II. A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE HISTORY OF PERSIA . . . . .	13
III. THE SHAH, HIS CAPITAL AND GOVERNMENT . . . . .	39
IV. THE PERSIAN MAN . . . . .	63
V. A PERSIAN CITY—MESHED THE HOLY . . . . .	88
VI. THE ENVIRONS OF A PERSIAN CITY—MESHED . . . . .	106
VII. A POPULAR ACCOUNT OF THE RELIGIONS OF PERSIA . . . . .	122
VIII. MUHARRAM . . . . .	144
IX. TRAVEL . . . . .	157
X. THE PERSIAN WOMAN . . . . .	196
XI. COUNTRY LIFE . . . . .	210
XII. THE PERSIAN GULF AND THE KARUN RIVER . . . . .	224
XIII. FAUNA AND FLORA . . . . .	238
XIV. MARCO POLO IN PERSIA . . . . .	260

# PERSIA AND ITS PEOPLE

## CHAPTER

	PAGE
XV. A GLANCE AT THE ANTIQUITIES OF PERSIA.	. 270
XVI. SPORT AND AMUSEMENTS . . . . .	. 277
XVII. FOUR PERSIAN POETS . . . . .	. 284
XVIII. A SLIGHT ACCOUNT OF THE ARTS AND CRAFTS OF PERSIA . . . . .	. 315
XIX. PERSIAN SUPERSTITIONS AND THE ART OF MEDICINE . . . . .	. 325
INDEX . . . . .	. 341

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE YOUNG SHAH OF PERSIA . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
A PERSIAN LADY . . . . .	I
PERSIAN SCHOOL, BASTINADOING AN UNRULY PUPIL . . . . .	66
PRISONERS . . . . .	84
ENTRANCE TO SHRINE "IMAM REZA" . . . . .	92
COURTYARD OF THE SHRINE, "IMAM REZA" . . . . .	94
GRAVEYARD ROUND THE SHRINE OF MESHED . . . . .	98
POTTER'S STALL AT MESHED . . . . .	104
JAGHERK VALLEY . . . . .	106
DASTEH OF 10 <sup>TH</sup> MUHARRAM . . . . .	150
A PERSIAN GENTLEMAN ON THE ROAD . . . . .	162
YEZD . . . . .	178
PERSIAN WOMEN IN OUTDOOR DRESS. . . . .	200
GABR WOMAN AND CHILD . . . . .	208
THRESHING . . . . .	215
A PERSIAN GARDEN . . . . .	220
RUINS OF PERSEPOLIS, PROPYLÆA OF XERXES . . . . .	272
A PERSIAN CARPET FACTORY . . . . .	320
NOMADS WEAVING CARPETS . . . . .	324
PERSIAN BARBER EXTRACTING TEETH . . . . .	336
MAP . . . . .	340



A PERSIAN LADY



# PERSIA AND ITS PEOPLE

## CHAPTER I

### SOME DESCRIPTION OF PERSIA

THE Persians call themselves Irani and their land Iran, the word Persia being derived from the province of Fars or Pars, from which the Zoroastrians of Bombay take their name of Parsis.

The country is also known as the "Land of the Lion and the Sun," and though the king of beasts has almost died out, yet the symbol of the Zoroastrian deity shines glorious as ever, and on the national standard the sun is depicted with the face of a woman peering over the back of a lion.

The area of Persia is estimated at 628,000 square miles, that is to say it is more than three times the size of France, and its people number only about nine and a half millions. Therefore it will cause no surprise to hear that Persia has only fifteen inhabitants to a square mile, and that it is possible to travel for days in the country without coming across a village or even a human being. In fact the entire population of this great kingdom is considerably under the joint populations of London, Paris, and New York.

Persia is bounded on the north by the Caspian Sea and Russia in Asia; on the west by the Turkish Empire; on the east by Afghanistan and British Baluchistan, the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea washing its southern shores.

Within these boundaries there are enormous differences in the formation of the country and the climate. Cyrus the Great once commented on this fact by remarking that at one end of his kingdom his subjects might be dying of cold, while at the other they were being suffocated by the intense heat.

The centre of Persia is a vast plateau, some 2,000 to 6,000 feet in elevation, separated from the low-lying lands on the Caspian and the Persian Gulf by formidable mountain barriers, in which are many splendid peaks, ranging from 13,000 to 15,000 feet in height.

This table-land is crossed diagonally from north-west to south-east by frequent chains of mountains separating wide plains, and it is possible to drive between these ranges for some hundreds of miles. But if any one wishes to visit the capital Tehran or the holy city Meshed from Europe, he must, soon after leaving the Caspian, cross the Elburz mountains. This mighty chain runs over five hundred miles from west to east, and its highest peak, the extinct volcano Demavend, rises to a height of 20,000 feet.

Moreover, should the traveller wish to penetrate into the country by way of the Persian Gulf, he must negotiate a formidable mountain barrier, and clamber over lofty passes, the *kotals* between Bushire and Shiraz always being mentioned in terms of well-merited obloquy.

The late Dr. Blandford<sup>1</sup> pointed out that, as the edges of this huge plateau are all higher than its interior, hardly any of the rivers or streams find their way to the sea, but lose themselves in marshes, and the writer remembers seeing from the summit of a hill how the Zendeh Rud, the famous river on which Isfahan is built, ended abruptly in a broad, shallow lake on the wide plain below.

In such a country both the temperature and the rainfall vary greatly, and the feverish, moist heat of the regions round the Caspian and Persian Gulf is the exact opposite of the usually fine climate of the Plateau, where the exhilarating air is of such marvellous dryness and purity that objects can be seen at an almost incredible distance. The extremes of heat and cold, however, are very great on these uplands; there are always heavy falls of snow during the winter in the northern provinces, and though the sun may be powerful during the day, yet the thermometer falls to 15° or 20° at night.

In the summer the heat is often intense, and all who can do so migrate to the hills to escape it, the hot, dry winds being very trying. Sun apoplexy is not uncommon at this season, a "touch of the sun" giving fever to European and native alike, and it is dangerous to indulge in alcohol during the heat of the day.

Violent sandstorms are frequent in the spring in the "desert" provinces, and hailstorms in which the stones are large as marbles and deal destruction to fruit-trees and crops occur at the same season in the north. To give an idea of the changes of temperature, a traveller in the course of one day's march may leave

<sup>1</sup> "Zoology of Eastern Persia."

a frost-bound country and descend into a region of feathery palms, where he will find the atmosphere almost stifling. As to the rainfall, it has been computed that fifty inches fall annually at Resht on the Caspian, in contrast to the five or six inches in central and south-east Persia. The great bulk of the country is scantily watered, the rivers being few and small, and the lakes all salt; therefore most of the cultivation has to be carried on by means of irrigation, the mountain-streams being conveyed to the towns in subterranean aqueducts. Some of these are twenty miles in length, and occasionally are tunnelled at a great depth below the surface, needing constant care to prevent the endless passages getting choked up with earth.

A Frenchman once said that Persia was nothing but a desert, which was sometimes composed of sand and at others of salt, and the traveller will own that the description is not far wrong when he notices the sterility of the kingdom of the Shah. In passing through the country he will get an impression of great barren plains sprinkled with the *débris* from the equally bare, but often brilliantly coloured mountain ranges that divide them. Not a tree, a shrub, or a blade of grass is to be seen, and only camel-thorn and veitch are sparsely dotted about on the arid ground. The monotony is broken at intervals in the spring by the green of the young crops round a town or village, but the sunken fields on which the wheat and barley are sown have no hedges, only low mud banks for the purposes of irrigation. Were it not for the crops, the scenery would be coloured in tones of ochre, burnt sienna, and neutral tint, and it is indescribably dreary and monotonous on

the rare days when the sun is hidden. But when the heaven of intense turquoise blue vibrates with sunlight, everything is beautified, and most travellers succumb to the weird fascination of the landscape.

From what has gone before, the reader will understand that there must be great differences in the climate and vegetation of the thirty-three provinces into which the kingdom is divided.

Those round the Caspian grow rice, and have great forests, an exuberant vegetation, and numberless streams fed by the constant rain.

To the north-west and west in Azerbaijan, Luristan and the Bakhtiari country, is a region of mountains which may be called the Highlands of Persia, and which is visited by winters of great severity, and to the south of the latter district is Arabistan, a province where the dry heat in summer reaches over 120° indoors, and where enormous quantities of wheat could be grown with the necessary irrigation.

Along the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea the low-lying country has an almost intolerable damp heat during the greater part of the year, but is arid in the extreme, not being visited by the heavy rainfall of the Caspian provinces. Here dates are the staple food and chief product of the country, and Laristan, Makran, and Baluchistan are peopled by Arab tribes on the coast and by Baluchis inland.

North of this region is the small eastern province of Sistan, interesting to Persians as being the home of their great hero Rustum, and to geographers from its physical conformation. As Lord Curzon writes :<sup>1</sup> “. . . not only do the lakes alternately swell, recede

<sup>1</sup> “ Persia.”

and disappear—the idea of displacement covering an extent, according to Rawlinson, of one hundred miles in length by fifty miles in width—but the rivers also are constantly shifting their beds, sometimes taking a sudden fancy for what has hitherto been an artificial channel, but which they soon succeed in converting into a very good imitation of a natural channel, in order to perplex some geographer of the future. It is not surprising, therefore, that while the country owes to the abundant alluvium thus promiscuously showered upon it its store of wealth and fertility, it also contains more ruined cities and habitations than are perhaps to be found within a similar space of ground anywhere in the world.”

The dry heat during the summer reaches 121°, and the insect pests that breed in the great *Hamun*, or Lagoon, into which the river Helmand empties itself, make life a burden. Fortunately, however, Sistan is visited late in May or early in June by the beneficent *bad-i-sud-i-bist ruz* (wind of a hundred and twenty days), that tempers the heat and drives away the mosquitoes and sand-flies. It has been registered to blow at the rate of seventy-two miles an hour, making the climate bearable and not unhealthy, though the natives suffer a good deal from malaria.

A glance at the map will show an enormous space marked Lut, or Desert, supposed to have been formerly a dried-up inland sea, occupying the centre of the country, and severing the north from the south and the east from the west of Persia, thus doing much to interrupt free communication. Half the large province of Khorasan in the north-east is Sahara, and such big towns as Kum and Kashan lie on the edge of the

glittering *Kavir*, or salt desert, through which runs a river of brine ; at Yezd, the sandy hummocks of the waterless Lut are almost up to the walls of the city, reminding the traveller of the prophecy that the town is to be overwhelmed by the sand at some future date, and Kerman, two hundred miles further south-east, is only separated by a small cultivated area from this dreary waste that has to be skirted when proceeding southwards into Baluchistan. It may easily be grasped what a tremendous obstacle to intercourse is this great desert, and it is partly owing to its presence that the large towns are more or less isolated, and that the inhabitants centre their interests in their particular cities and not in the country as a whole. In fact, so bad are the communications and so costly is the transport, that if there happen to be a famine in one district, the population must starve, though in other parts of the country there might be bumper crops.

Perhaps what chiefly strikes the European is the poverty everywhere apparent. He will have read accounts of the splendour in which the Achæmenian and Sasanian monarchs lived, and traditions of the Golden Age of Shah Abbas are still extant, and he will wonder whether Persia could possibly have looked so hopelessly "out at elbows" as it does to-day. It could never have been a rich kingdom, and its monarchs drew a great part of their revenue from far more fertile provinces that owned their sway ; but still, wherever the traveller may go, he will find ruins of villages long deserted, towns surrounded by quarters once inhabited and now falling into decay ; even in the Lut there are remains of cultivation showing that the oases were far more frequent than they are at present,

and in barren Baluchistan he will observe how the hills are terraced in many parts, the uncivilised inhabitants, who make no use of these long-ago labours, putting them down to the work of "infidels." Many writers consider that the terrible Mongol invasion was a blow from which Persia has never recovered; but good government could still do much for a country in which the desert literally "blossoms like the rose" if it be irrigated.

Under the system of the Shahs, in which every one in power "squeezes" to his utmost every one below him, there is no protection for property and no encouragement given to enterprise. Thus the country grows steadily poorer as the years pass by, though the prices of food are always on the increase, as the following table will show:—

COST OF LIVING AT TEHRAN IN 1880 AND 1900.<sup>2</sup>

	1880			1900		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Bread per man (6½ lbs.) ...	0	0	3½	0	0	9½
Mutton „ „ ...	0	1	2½	0	2	9½
Cheese „ „ ...	0	1	6	0	2	4½
Milk „ „ ...	0	0	4½	0	0	9½
Eggs per hundred ...	0	1	6	0	3	7½

The writer who remembered that eggs were ten a penny at Kerman a dozen years ago, found that only three to four were to be purchased for the same sum at Meshed in 1909, and the old days when meat and bread were under a penny a pound and a chicken could be obtained for twopence and a diminutive lamb for fourpence halfpenny, were gone for good.

<sup>2</sup> "Statesman's Year-Book, 1909."



So barren is Persia at the present day that the uncultivated land surrounding any city looks like a desert, and the ruthless cutting down of the forests through the centuries has done much to decrease the naturally scanty rainfall. Coal being only found near the capital, wood is used everywhere for burning in the form of charcoal, and if no new plantations are laid out Persia's most thickly wooded districts will, in time, become as denuded of trees as is the central Plateau. In fact so expensive is wood in many parts, that much of the heating and cooking are done by means of the *boussa*, or camel-thorn, donkeys bringing it daily into the towns.

In this large country, treble the area of France, there are only six miles of railway. Of roads, in the European sense of the word, there are only four, their total length, when added together, being about 780 miles; and these owe their existence to European enterprise. Practically everything is carried on the backs of camels and mules along the rough and often dangerous tracks made by the caravans during many centuries. There is only one navigable river, the Karun, which flows into the head of the Persian Gulf, and on this latter sea the ports are open roadsteads at which it is impossible to land cargo during stormy weather, only the port of Enzeli on the Caspian being important.

Persia has merely single-wire telegraph lines, the rickety poplar poles of which are often seen lying on the ground, in which case the Persian official at the nearest station will calmly remark that the line "does not speak to-day." In great contrast to this is the British three-wire line, supported on iron posts, which runs from the Persian frontier on the north-west down

to Bushire on the Persian Gulf, from which point messages to India are carried by cable to Bombay, and this line now has a branch from Kashan to Karachi *via* British Baluchistan in order to ensure a direct overland connection with our Indian Empire.

Owing to the lack of communications very little is done to tap the resources of the country. For example, Persia possesses many minerals, but as she has no railways, roads, or navigable rivers to carry them to the ports or to markets, this source of wealth is almost untouched. The famous turquoise mines near Nishapur, which have been known from very early times, produce the only precious stones which have been found in the kingdom, and are most inadequately worked, and the valuable Caspian fisheries are leased to a Russian company, most of the sturgeon or salmon caught in abundance finding their way to Russia.

For many years the imports of Persia have exceeded the exports, and this is partly owing to the slow and expensive methods of carriage, and still more to a short-sighted Government that puts obstacles in the way of enterprise and is suspicious of any man who becomes rich and does not conceal the fact. There is never any question of the Shah subsidising any private undertaking, and merchants and traders consider the "powers that be" as real benefactors if they will only leave their subjects to pursue their avocations without let or hindrance.

Sterile as Iran appears to be, yet an able ruler might do great things for his country, and the Englishman cannot but long for a man of the type of Lord Cromer to be allowed a free hand in remodelling the administration of the kingdom.

Like ourselves the Persians are of Aryan stock, and have the same words for father, mother, brother, and daughter (*pidar*, *madar*, *bradar*, and *dukhtar*); moreover, the construction of their language is like English. A mass of Arabic words is, however, incorporated in it, for when Islam was forced upon Persia, at the point of the sword, the converts had to recite their prayers three times daily in Arabic, and read the Koran in that language, no Persian translation of the sacred book being permitted until of late years, when the innovation met with strenuous opposition from the priesthood.

In appearance the true Irani is a handsome, well-built man with regular features and fine, dark eyes, his complexion resembling that of an Italian or Spaniard. But it must not be forgotten that Persia has been invaded again and again by the Central Asian tribes, and therefore the inhabitant of Shiraz, gay and extravagant, nervous and excitable, a lover of poetry and horses, and who claims to be of pure Persian stock, is very different to the semi-Turkish population of the north-west or to the natives of Khorasan. These latter show traces of Mongol and Usbeg blood in their broad, flat faces, high cheek-bones, and in manners that are brusque and boorish in comparison with the refinement and polish of a Shirazi.

Again the Persian Gulf is bordered by Arab tribes, and throughout the whole country roam a shifting nomad population, the Iliats, who drive their flocks and herds up into the hills during the spring and summer months, and who probably enjoy a pleasanter existence than any one else in Iran. Certainly they have to pay taxes on their flocks and herds, but they are in nowise

“ground down” as are the villagers in many parts, and their sturdy women are usually adorned with plenty of jewellery and look the picture of health, in pleasant contrast to the often sickly townswomen.

## CHAPTER II

### A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE HISTORY OF PERSIA

THE beginnings of Persian history are wrapped in legend, but probably about B.C. 700 the Medes, an Iranian race dwelling in what is now North-West Persia, threw off the yoke of Assyria. They left no record of their achievements, but we know from other sources that one of their kings was such a mighty warrior that he led his armies into Europe. Side by side with the Medes lived the Persians, also an Iranian race, and in B.C. 550 Cyrus, the Persian of the Achæmenian line, conquered Astyages, the Median king, and the empire passed from the West Iranian Medes to South Iranian Persians, the two countries being united under the name of Persia. During the rule of the Medes, Zoroaster, a native of Media, started the creed of the Fire Worshippers, his first success being the conversion of the King of Bactria to the new doctrines which spread rapidly, and though probably receiving a check at the time of the Persian conquest, yet they speedily became the established religion of the country under the Achæmenian dynasty.

Cyrus, when he had strengthened his position at home, led his armies into Asia Minor, conquering and

taking captive Crœsus, King of Lydia, a man famous in classic story for his wealth and misfortunes, and annexing all the Greek colonies lying in those regions. But his greatest exploit was the capture of Babylon, a city deemed to be impregnable, of immense wealth, and boasting a civilisation far higher than that possessed by the Persians. With the downfall of this capital, Cyrus became master of Assyria, and his conquest contributed to raise Persia to the chief position in Asia. It is interesting that this monarch is mentioned in Isaiah by the words, "He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure."<sup>1</sup> According to a legend, Cyrus retired to a fountain in Azerbaijan, where he disappeared for ever from the sight of men, but in reality he died in battle against the Turanians or Tartars, and Cambyses (B.C. 529-522) succeeded him on the throne of Iran.

Although the new monarch increased the Persian Empire by the conquest of Egypt, yet he was without his father's ability and was cruel to boot, causing his brother Smerdis to be put to death secretly on suspicion of conspiring against him, and when he himself died by an accident there was no heir to the imperial crown. However, one of the Magi, or priests, strikingly like the murdered Smerdis, impersonated him, and ruled for a whole year before his imposture was discovered, when he was overthrown by the chief nobles of Persia, one of whom, under the title of Darius I., was raised to the vacant throne.

And now again Persia had a monarch worthy to stand in the place of Cyrus, for Darius (B.C. 521-485) was a leader of men, a great general and a skilful ruler. He

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xlv. 28.

enlarged the borders of Persia eastward as far as the Indus ; tried to force his way northwards into Russia—but here the elements obliged him to retreat—and then he turned his attention westwards, meeting at the hands of the Greeks the great reverse of his reign. The Persian army, mustering some fifty thousand men, all accustomed to war, and having hardly ever tasted defeat, was utterly routed on the plains of Marathon by the patriotism and enthusiasm of the Greeks, who could only produce a force one-fifth of the size of the Persian host, which was compelled to return ignominiously to Asia.

If one of the greatest monarchs that ever ruled Persia were powerless against the Greeks, it may hardly be expected that Xerxes (B.C. 485-465), who succeeded Darius, and was a man of ordinary ability, should do better than his father. However, he determined to undertake the adventure which has made his name notorious, and collected the largest army that had ever been known, to conquer the little people to whose genius the world owes so much. Every schoolboy knows what followed—the heroic defence of the pass of Thermopylæ by Leonidas and his immortal Three Hundred ; the naval battles off Artemisium ; the abandonment of Athens to be burnt by the invaders, and the last stand of the Greeks at Salamis, hazarding their all upon a single battle which resulted in a crushing defeat for the Persians, and which, when followed by the Greek victory of Plataea, settled for centuries the question as to whether Asia should conquer Europe.

On the death of Xerxes the kingdom fell into the hands of incompetent rulers ; Egypt was lost after being held by Persia for over a century, and disorder and anarchy were rife. Artaxerxes III. found a hard

task on his accession, but being a man of exceptional ability he almost succeeded in restoring Iran to her former greatness, and would probably have done so had he not been murdered in the full tide of his activities.

Up to now the Persian arms had been carried into Europe, but with Darius III. (B.C. 336-329) enthroned at Persepolis things were reversed, and Alexander the Macedonian, one of the greatest generals the world has ever seen, led his soldiers into Asia. The Persian troops, splendid fighters if well led, being now under a monarch both cowardly and incompetent, were beaten at Issus and routed at Arbela. After this battle the Persian Empire fell into the hands of the conqueror, and with the assassination of the fugitive Darius in B.C. 329, the Achæmenian dynasty, established over two centuries before by Cyrus the Great, came to an end.

And now Alexander had before him the task of pacifying the empire that he had subdued, this being the more necessary as his ardent spirit longed to proceed to the conquest of India, though his knowledge of war taught him the danger of leaving a country at enmity with him in his rear.

He set about his work in two ways—first by mixing Persian soldiers with his own regiments, and secondly by commanding his legionaries to marry the women of the country, he himself wedding Roxana, the daughter of a Bactrian prince, and later on, Statira, grand-daughter of Artaxerxes III. When this was done he marched into India, but to his bitter disappointment he was forced by his war-worn veterans to turn back before the Ganges was reached. The great



conqueror then retraced his steps to Babylon, which he made his capital, and busied himself with getting his empire into order before his early death, leaving the satrapies, or governments into which Cyrus had divided the realm, much as they were.

In B.C. 323 Alexander died, and immediately there arose fierce strife among his generals for the possession of the empire, the emperor's son being but a child, and from the Indus to the Nile there was civil war with its accompaniments of misery and anarchy. The less civilised Macedonians sought to lord it over the cultured Greeks, who had formed no small part of Alexander's conquering armies, and one result of this struggle for the mastery was the terrible episode of twenty-three thousand Greeks, being surprised and slain by the Macedonians as they were marching back to their native land. Out of all this discord the General Seleucus, seizing upon Babylon and its province, founded the dynasty of the Seleucidæ, and the Greeks in Bactria revolted and formed a state in the heart of Asia, this kingdom lasting for a century, and even carrying its arms into India.

And now we must enter upon a new period of Persian history. About this time certain nomad tribes inhabiting the steppes north of the river Atrek left their native country and settled in Parthia, or what is now known as Khorasan, a large province of northern Persia, and these intruders founded the Parthian dynasty.

They were great fighters and wonderful horsemen, the expression "Parthian shot" being derived from their custom of pretending to fly before an enemy in confusion, and then turning in their saddles and shoot-

ing arrows at their pursuers, often defeating them by this ruse. In B.C. 250 these nomads had acquired so much territory that their chief ascended the throne of Parthia with the title of Arsaces I., and for more than four centuries he and his descendants ruled in Persia, and again and again put to rout the armies of Imperial Rome, the mistress of the western world.

The Parthians, far inferior in civilisation to the Persians, kept few records, the historian of these times depending upon the coins they struck and the accounts furnished by Greek and Roman writers.

Chief among their monarchs was Mithridates the Great (B.C. 171-138) who broke the power of the Seleucid dynasty, keeping its king a captive for the rest of his days, conquered the kingdom of Armenia and extended his realms from the Indus to the Euphrates. A significant fact, showing the position to which the Parthians had now attained, was the treaty of peace which they entered into with Rome, the first of many meetings between these two great Powers.

In B.C. 54 Orodes being King of Parthia, Crassus, who was triumvir in conjunction with Cæsar and Pompey, thought that the time was favourable for an attack on the Parthians, whom he imagined would prove an easy conquest. The Roman legions met their foes at Carrhæ on the Euphrates, and the Parthians displayed their usual tactics, on this occasion concealing the main body of their army. Their cavalry then charged, made a feint of fleeing, and was hotly pursued by the Romans into the very jaws of the hidden troops that suddenly surrounded and cut them up. Then the Parthians attacked the infantry, forced the main body

of the army to surrender, and slew Crassus, thus inflicting the greatest defeat that the Romans had suffered since the time of Hannibal.

Orodes throughout the rest of his reign brought his country to a high pitch of power, and was the first Parthian monarch who took the proud Achæmenian title of King of Kings.

He was, however, murdered by his son Phraates, who, having mounted the throne, made Ctesiphon on the Tigris his capital. This city was the seat of Government until the Mohammedan conquest, the Sasanian dynasty building a magnificent palace there in which they dwelt in almost fabulous luxury.

In B.C. 33 Mark Antony, being eager to avenge the death of Crassus, and determined to add fresh lustre to his reputation, led a large army to the invasion of Parthia, taking the country altogether by surprise. However, he fared hardly better than his predecessor, and so vigorous was the opposition he encountered that he was obliged to retreat into Armenia, only reaching that country after the loss of thirty thousand of his troops.

This experience made Rome leave Parthia in peace for over a century, and it is a remarkable fact that the Parthian and Persian races were the only ones that forced the Romans, masters of more than half the known world, to check their advance.

But the fear that Parthia inspired brought about her undoing, for with no Roman peril to unite her people and keep her armies in a state of readiness, she fell into civil war, king after king leaving only records of bloodshed and discord behind him. In A.D. 63 we see a Parthian monarch on friendly terms with the Roman

Emperor Vespasian; later on Trajan attempted to invade the kingdom, but even in its weakness he could make no conquest and was obliged to retire, and though Cassius managed to destroy Seleucia, the capital of Babylonia, yet neither he nor any invader could penetrate to the heart of the empire.

The last of the Parthian line was Artabanus, a man of such ability that he was almost able to restore his empire now fallen asunder through intrigue, corruption, and civil war. The Roman Emperor Macrinus, probably thinking that Parthia would fall an easy prey to his arms, attempted an invasion, but his armies suffered two such crushing defeats that he was forced to sue for peace, which he purchased by paying the huge indemnity for those days of fifty million denarii, or, roughly, about £1,800,000.

But even this tremendous victory for Parthia could not save her from her doom. It was nearly six hundred years since Alexander had subdued the last of the Achæmenian monarchs, and during all those centuries Persia proper remained merely as a province of a Greco-Persian or of a Parthian Empire, and it might have been thought that the Persians had become too inseparably welded with their conquerors to think again of independence. However, a quick-witted, intellectual race, with a great past behind it of which it is justly proud, and a great capacity for fighting if well led, cannot submit tamely to be under a nation whom it considers its inferior in civilisation and mental ability. Moreover, there was a cleavage between Parthians and Persians on religious grounds, the former having fallen away from Zoroastrianism and taken to idol-worship, while the latter clung to the teachings of their great Prophet.

The restoration of Persia to her ancient position was the work of Ardeshir, satrap of the province of Persis, and supposed to be descended from the old Achæmenian dynasty through his ancestor Sasan. He revolted and proclaimed the independence of Persis, speedily annexed what is now the province of Kerman, and defeated Artabanus in three pitched battles, in the last of which the Parthian monarch was slain, and the Sasanian dynasty (A.D. 226-652) that was to carry Persia to one of the highest positions among the nations, now commenced. Ardeshir was soon involved in a war with the old enemy Rome, but he forced the legions of Alexander Severus to fly, and having subdued Armenia, which still held out for Parthia, he found himself in a position equal in power to the Achæmenian or Parthian dynasties at their prime.

One of his first acts was the destruction of the Parthian idols and the restoration of the religion taught by Zoroaster. The entire copies of the Avesta and Gathas are believed to have been destroyed when Alexander burnt one of the palaces of Persepolis, but as many fragments as possible were collected, and one of the Magi, chosen by lot, translated the Zoroastrian scriptures from the archaic Median into Pahlavi, the spoken language of the day, and wrote them down. From this time the influence of the Magi became paramount, all other religions were persecuted, and still further to honour the state-religion Ardeshir stamped his coinage with a fire-altar and priests.

He was succeeded by his son Shapur I. (240-273), a great soldier and administrator, who is principally remembered for the crushing defeat he inflicted on the Romans. The Emperor Valerian and his entire army

were forced to surrender to the Persians, who kept the monarch in captivity until his death, and who commemorated their great victory in two rock-sculptures.

To Shapur belongs the honour of commencing the famous irrigation dam at Shuster, which is still perfect and allows the waters of the Karun river to irrigate the fertile plain, thus conferring prosperity on thousands. During his reign the Nestorian Christians made many converts, and the remarkable teacher Mani founded a new religion, which, though hated equally by Christian and Zoroastrian, had much influence: in spite of the cruel death of its founder, there were actually Manichæans until the thirteenth century, when the hapless Albigenses, followers of his doctrine, were exterminated in France.

After the reign of Shapur I. a series of incapable kings sat on the throne, and Shapur II. succeeded to an empire convulsed with insurrection within its borders and invasion from without, but, mere boy as he was, he had the gift of kingship, and Persia again grew great under his sway. The intermittent war with Rome was renewed in his reign, and, as usual, the Romans were defeated, on this occasion their Emperor Julian being slain and his successor having to patch up a disgraceful peace, to secure the retreat of his army from Persian soil. The Roman legionaries were the finest soldiers ever known, and were practically invincible in Europe, yet Persia, whether under a Parthian or a Sasanian dynasty, hurled them again and again from her borders, showing of what her sons were capable. Rome sent her best generals and her chosen veterans to the conquest of Iran, but the only result, during several cen-

turies of warfare, was defeat, the surrender of whole armies, and either the death or captivity of their generals.

Shapur II. was succeeded by inefficient monarchs, and the kingdom was rent with intrigue and corruption, though Bahram V., called by Persians Bahram Gor, from his fondness for hunting the fleet wild ass, became a popular hero on account of his success in checking the advance of a great horde of nomads, who were pouring into Persia from the north-east.

Bahram, who had been brought up in youth among the Arabs, was a celebrated shot with the bow, and the Persians have a tradition that one day he actually nailed an antelope's hoof to its ear, as the animal was scratching its head. On turning to his favourite wife for applause, he was so greatly disgusted at her cool observation, "Practice makes perfect," that he sent her into banishment. Some years after, when on a hunting expedition, he was amazed at seeing a woman carry a full-grown cow up a flight of twenty steps, and asking her for an explanation of this extraordinary feat of strength, she remarked, "Practice makes perfect," and raising her veil revealed the features of his exiled wife, whom the monarch promptly restored to favour.

Kobad, a later king, is chiefly notable for his victories over the Romans led by Belisarius, one of the most famous of their generals, and during the following reign the Roman Emperor was actually forced to pay tribute to the Sasanian monarch.

This king, Khosru I. (531-579), raised Persia to a great height of power. He was equally capable as a warrior and as a lawgiver, had a love of knowledge,

was tolerant to all creeds, founded a school of medicine, remodelled his army, the system of taxation, and repaired the roads and bridges throughout the country, completing the famous dyke at Shuster, that Shapur I. had commenced. He also erected a magnificent palace at his capital, Ctesiphon—the remains of which give some idea of its former grandeur—and when he died after a reign of forty-eight years, he was greatly mourned, and has gone down to posterity with the title of the Just.

The poet Saadi relates the following anecdote of this monarch: "When some venison was being cooked for Nushirvan the Just during a hunting-party, the royal servants found that they had forgotten the salt, and accordingly sent a lad to get some from the nearest village. The king commanded that the salt should be paid for, lest the village be ruined. His courtiers asked him how such a trivial demand as a handful of salt could possibly bring a village to desolation, and Nushirvan answered, 'When oppression began in the world it was a very small thing, but every one has increased it, so that at the present day it is of vast extent.'" And Saadi amplifies the sentence by remarking:

"If the king eats a single apple from a subject's orchard  
His slaves pull up the tree by its roots.  
For five eggs that a king permits to be seized  
His soldiers will snatch a thousand fowls for their spits."

And these remarks are as true of the Persia of this generation as they were in the time of the great Khosru.



The decline of the Sasanian Empire began after the death of this monarch, although his grandson obtained the proud title of Khosru Parvis (590-628), or the Conqueror, in recognition of his military successes.

For a part of his reign he did much for the art of his country, fostered law and order and kept Persia powerful and feared by her neighbours. There are many traditions about his devotion to his favourite wife, the fair Shirin, a Christian, who kept her ascendancy over her husband during her whole lifetime, a remarkable fact in Oriental history. A favourite legend has it that the architect Ferhad fell desperately in love with the beautiful queen, and that Khosru, in jest, promised to yield up his wife if the youth could bore through the huge rock of Besitun and bring a stream by way of the tunnel. This was an apparently impossible task, but Ferhad, nerved by love, so nearly succeeded, that the monarch in dismay sent a messenger to tell him that Shirin was dead, and the story relates that, on receiving the news, the architect fell headlong from the great rock and was dashed to pieces at its foot.

In the early part of his reign Khosru Parvis was deposed by his rebellious general, Bahram Chubin, and he had to seek the aid of the Romans before he could recover his kingdom, which, after this interlude, he ruled for thirty-seven years.

During this period he took Jerusalem and carried off the supposed True Cross, presenting the relic to Shirin, and in his reign, after the lapse of nine centuries, the Persians were again masters of Egypt. Not content with this they fought unweariedly against the hereditary enemy Rome until the realms in Asia and

East Africa, over which the Mistress of the West had held sway for centuries, were entirely wrested from her. No wonder that Khosru gained his title of "Conqueror," for at no period of her history had Persia ruled over a larger empire and never had she reached a higher pitch of civilisation, the splendour in which her emperor dwelt recalling the fancies of a fairy-tale. During the full tide of his prosperity a message was brought to him one day from Mecca, bidding him acknowledge a certain Mohammed as the Prophet of God. Not unnaturally the king treated the missive with contempt, little thinking that before many years had passed the followers of the writer of that letter would have swept away the proud Sasanian line. Sir Clements Markham<sup>1</sup> points out that Fortune from that day averted her face from the man, who was at one time the most powerful monarch in the known world.

In A.D. 617 his soldiers were within a mile of Constantinople, and if the capital of the Roman Empire had been taken, Europe would have lain at the feet of the victorious Persians. The Emperor Heraclius had made arrangements for escaping from the apparently doomed city, but his subjects forced him to remain, and his despair awoke in him an unsuspected military ability. With troops inferior in numbers to those of the Persians, he defeated them again and again, wresting from them all the provinces that they had conquered, and the Persian king, in spite of every effort, suffered nothing but reverses, and finally was killed by his nobles who were headed by his own son Siroes.

In the whole annals of history there is perhaps no

<sup>1</sup> "History of Persia."

character who rose to such heights of power, brought his country to such a pitch of prosperity, and then perished so miserably, through, it appears, no fault of his own, though some authorities say he became enervated by luxury and excess. At his death eleven rulers succeeded one another to the vacant throne, two queens among the number—the first women who had ever held the sceptre in Persia—but their united reigns only amounted to five years.

And all this time the Empire, torn by dissension, bloodshed, and anarchy, was tottering to its fall, and Yazdigird III. succeeded to an inheritance threatened by a foe who would exterminate both the dynasty of Sasan and the ancient religion of Zoroaster.

The Arabs had engaged in battle with the Persians in the time of Khosru Parvis, and though the result was indecisive, yet they had learnt the important fact that the warriors of Iran were not invincible. Since then success and fanaticism had made the followers of the Prophet far stronger, and they met the forces of young Yazdigird on the plain of el-Kadinyah A.D. 636. At this historic battle the Arabs utterly defeated the Persians and gained possession of their national standard, the blacksmith Kavah's leather apron, which had led the Persians into battle for a thousand years, since the days when the legendary Feridun had delivered his country from the tyranny of King Zohak, typifying, according to some writers, Persia's revolt from the Assyrian dominion.

The Arabs found Persia, even in her decay, no easy conquest, and they met with a stout resistance, the gallant Yazdigird keeping up the struggle for some ten years after the fatal battle of

Nehavend, that left the Moslems masters of the country. The last Sasanian monarch was murdered by a miller near Merv as he fled from his foes, and with his death ended the great dynasty under which Persia had been carried to a height of power and prosperity only equalled under the rule of the first Darius.

The wild Arabs gave their new subjects the choice between accepting the Koran or death, and it seems an irony of Fate that the followers of the pure religion of Zoroaster should have been forcibly "converted" by a race that had only just turned from the grossest idolatry, and that was on a far lower plane of civilisation than the Persians. Zoroastrianism was almost stamped out of the kingdom, a few adherents lingering on in such out-of-the-way towns as Yezd and Kerman, where at the present day they are stigmatised as *Gabrs*, or infidels, but live practically unmolested.

And now followed eight centuries of Persia as a subject kingdom, torn by wars and invasions, ruled by dynasty after dynasty of aliens, and laid desolate by the terrible Mongol hordes of Chinghiz Khan, or the Tartars of Timur. And yet, though her independence was crushed, Persia refined and civilised her rough conquerors, who assimilated her beautiful arts, carrying them into all the countries which they conquered, and where now they go by the name of Saracenic. At the Court of the Khalifs at Baghdad, Persian customs, music, and even dress were the fashion; and the son of the famous Harun al Raschid revived the national Persian festival of No Ruz (New Year's Day).

Firdawsi, the Homer of Persia, composed his great patriotic epic the "Book of Kings" about 1000 A.D.; Avicenna, the famous philosopher and doctor, was his contemporary; and Omar Khayyam, the astronomer-poet, flourished later—to give but a few names out of a great revival of Persian thought and literature that took place, and which centred in such cities as Tus, Nishapur, Bokhara, Merv, and Herat.

During these centuries, as the power of the Khalifate at Baghdad grew weaker, various dynasties rose and fell in Persia. We hear of the Saffari line—the name taken from the occupation of its founder, a brazier of Sistan; also of the Samanian dynasty whose founder, descended from the old Persian nobility, seized the north of Persia and made Bokhara his capital, and did his utmost to foster Persian literature, reviving the national spirit that had been kept in check during the two centuries since the Arab conquest. Later on Togrul, the Seljuk, led his hordes of Turks into Persia and founded a dynasty which produced two brilliant kings, Alp Arslan and his son Malik-Shah, who ruled well, and encouraged science and literature, and had for Prime Minister the famous Nizam-ul-Mulk who administered their domains with the utmost wisdom and beneficence.

As was usual, these kings were succeeded by monarchs of little capacity, and their empire soon fell a prey to small princes who carved out petty kingdoms for themselves.

In the thirteenth century Persia was invaded by the Mongols, and it is believed that she has never recovered from that awful visitation. Chinghiz Khan, the leader of these savage hordes, boasted that he had slain

thirteen millions of his fellow-creatures, and making every allowance for exaggeration, it can be understood that such a tiger in human form athirst for blood, and with the power of gratifying his lust to the full, could inflict untold misery on the world. His heathen hordes massacred men, women, and children in cold blood. They gave no quarter if they took a town, history relating that they slew thirty thousand of the inhabitants of Bokhara. They razed any fine building to the ground, and did their best to turn fertile lands into a desert. The enfeebled Khalifate at Baghdad fell before their onslaught, and the last Khalif was put to death by Hulagu Khan, grandson of Chinghiz.

Things improved for the Persians when Hulagu Khan became a Mohammedan, and he and his successors governed wisely, were tolerant to all religions, and encouraged science and literature, these characteristics being very remarkable in princes whose ancestors had led a savage nomad life, remote from all culture.

The Mongol rulers were succeeded by Timur the Lame, who overran Persia with his Tartars towards the latter half of the fourteenth century, and Iran became a province of his vast Asiatic Empire.

But a time of deliverance was approaching, and it is interesting to note that after more than eight centuries of bondage Persia obtained her freedom through the very religion that overthrew it. In the early days of Islam, the Mohammedans fought hotly as to who should succeed the Prophet, and after awhile were divided into two sects, Shiahs and Sunnis. The Shiahs contended that upon the death of Mohammed, Ali and his family were his lawful successors, and they considered that the three Khalifs who succeeded the

Prophet were merely usurpers. After the terrible massacre of nearly all the descendants of Ali by the rival faction, practically the whole Mohammedan world became Sunni; but the inhabitants of Persia were fiercely Shiah, though usually governed by Sunni rulers.

The deliverer of Persia arose in the person of Ismail, ruler of the town of Ardebil and descended from both Ali and the Sasanian dynasty. The country flocked to his standard, and in 1499 he was proclaimed founder of the Sefavi dynasty, Persia from this date being an independent kingdom, save for one brief interval. At his death he left a powerful empire, which would probably have gone to ruin if his three immediate successors had not been followed by great Shah Abbas, whose rule is always referred to by Persians as a Golden Age.

This monarch, the contemporary of our Queen Elizabeth and James I., was not only great as warrior and administrator, but he fostered the Renaissance of art which bloomed alike in Asia as in Europe at this epoch. To this day Persians attribute every fine building, road, or bridge to Shah Abbas, so lasting an impression did this monarch make on his country, and in the words of Chardin,<sup>1</sup> "When this prince ceased to live, Persia ceased to prosper."

At his death the Sefavi dynasty produced a series of inefficient monarchs, and in 1722 the Afghans invaded the country and established themselves in the royal city of Isfahan, only to be dislodged by the Persian bandit afterwards Nadir Shah. This great soldier first delivered Persia from her enemies, and then, usurping

<sup>1</sup> "Voyages en Perse."

the crown, conquered Afghanistan and led his armies into India, where he sacked Delhi, the famous capital of the Moguls, and returned laden with almost fabulous treasure.

He was assassinated before he could found a dynasty, and at his death, in 1747, his vast empire fell into anarchy: Khorasan apparently was the only province of Persia left in the possession of Nadir's descendants, the conqueror's blind grandson exercising a nominal sovereignty at Meshed.

The Bakhtiari tribes, inhabiting the mountain ranges in the south-west supported a scion of the Sefavi line, who, with the aid of Kerim Khan, his able minister, became master of Persia with the exception of Georgia and Khorasan. Kerim Khan then deposed his puppet sovereign, and became founder of the Zend dynasty, taking Shiraz for his capital and ruling Persia with wisdom and justice for twenty years. He kept in subjection the powerful Kajar tribes that had Astrabad on the Caspian as their headquarters and were of Turkish origin. At his death, however, Agha Mohammed Khan, the head of the Kajars, who had been detained in an honourable captivity at Shiraz, managed to escape, and put himself at the head of his tribe to do battle for the possession of Persia. The last of the Zend dynasty was the gallant Lutf Ali Khan, and he had for Vizier the clever Haji Ibrahim, who had administered the realm for the young prince's father. Lutf Ali Khan was possessed of indomitable courage, and had much capacity for war; but he fell a victim to the Kajar chieftain owing to the base treachery of Haji Ibrahim, who intrigued against his sovereign, and betrayed Shiraz into the hands of his enemies. Lutf



Ali Khan was never greater than in danger and adversity ; and though defeated again and again by his powerful opponent, yet he fought on undauntedly and made his final stand at Kerman. Here again treachery overcame one of the most gallant rulers of history, secret foes opening the gates of Kerman to Agha Mohammed, who gave the city up to massacre, and it is stated ordered twenty, and some say seventy thousand pairs of human eyes to be given to him as a ransom from the inhabitants.

The Zend prince cut his way through the Kajar troops and took refuge at Bam, where again treachery proved his undoing, for the Governor of that town delivered up his guest to the Kajar conqueror who put him to death in his twenty-sixth year.

And now Persia was ruled by an alien tribe of Turkish origin, the members of whom are said to have been unable to speak the language of Iran. Agha Mohammed, the founder of the dynasty, took Tehran for his capital in order to be in touch with the Caspian provinces, which had always declared for the Kajars, and he soon established himself firmly throughout the country. Although his military genius is undisputed, he appears to have been almost superhumanly cruel and tyrannical. His nephew Fath Ali Shah succeeded him ; but as he looked upon Persia as a conquered country, and was very avaricious, it may easily be understood that he did little for the improvement of his realm. Haji Ibrahim, who had betrayed the chivalrous Zend prince, was the Vizier of this second Kajar Shah ; but it is said that old Agha Mohammed had advised his nephew to get rid of a servant who had acted so treacherously to a former master. Therefore, when

Fath Ali Shah became jealous of his minister's great influence, he caused him to be cruelly put to death and seized his wealth. During this reign the Russians, who had encroached upon Persia before, made war twice on the country, the result of which was that Persia lost provinces in the Caucasus and on the Caspian, and this sea was converted into a Russian lake, upon which any armed Persian vessel was forbidden.

It may be asked how it was that the Persians, who had been so distinguished in the field, were now almost contemptible fighters? This was partly owing to the Kajar policy of breaking the power of the chiefs of the nomad tribes, such as the Bakhtiari, Ilyat, and Lur, who had hitherto led their own clansmen to battle and were great fighting men. Moreover, owing to the misgovernment of the Kajar rulers, their soldiers were usually ill-paid, their wages being embezzled by their superior officers, who gave the troops in their charge no proper military training and kept them short of food and clothing. This evil custom is, alas! in force at the present day.

When Fath Ali Shah died, after a reign of thirty-seven years, he had lost much Persian territory and had governed his country with the sole idea of getting as much wealth out of her for his own personal advantage as he could. His successor, Mohammed Shah was not a particularly successful monarch, and the latter's son, Nasr-ed-Din Shah, known as being the first Shah to visit Europe, though well-meaning, was not a man of commanding ability, and his efforts to introduce Western civilisation into his country were often a putting of new wine into old bottles. At the commencement of his reign he had a most able minister,

who did much for the welfare of Persia, but, as is often the case in Oriental countries, the Shah grew jealous of his Vizier's influence, and put him to death, following in this the example of his father and great-grandfather who thus treated their Prime Ministers. During the early part of his reign, Nasr-ed-Din Shah tried to seize Herat, and in consequence became involved in a war with England, who took Bushire and engaged the Persian army at the mouth of the Karun river, the Shah's troops flying in a disgraceful confusion. After this Persia signed a treaty in which she yielded to all the demands of Great Britain, and since then the boundaries of her empire have been delimited.

After the Shah's first visit to Europe in 1874 he instituted a regular postal service with the aid of Austrians, the stamps being printed in Austria. He also gave a concession to the Indo-European Telegraph Company, by means of which our direct communication with India passes through Persia; and later allowed the Imperial Bank of Persia to be founded under British management.

Military colleges at Tabriz and Tehran and a Polytechnic School at the capital were some of the Shah's schemes; but the country as a whole was ill-governed. The provinces were put up at a kind of auction at No Ruz to the highest bidder; the peasantry were heavily taxed, and nothing done to improve the internal communications.

Nasr-ed-Din's European journeys and the enormous expenses of his great *anderoon* (*hareem*) made serious inroads on the exchequer, and his successor, Muzaffer-ed-Din, still further squandered the royal hoards in Europe, so that when Mohammed Ali Shah succeeded

to the throne in 1907 he found a much-exhausted treasury.

Nasr-ed-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 by a religious fanatic, said to be one of the remarkable sect of Babis who had attempted his life during the early part of his reign. The Shah was possessed of some literary talent, and the diary of his experiences in Europe was published on his return to Persia, and is interesting to read. He was also a keen sportsman and a good shot and rider, and, according to his lights, did his best for his country.

His son, Muzaffer-ed-Din Shah, amiable but much out of health, began his reign as an absolute monarch. Ideas of progress and liberty were, however, rife in Persia, the people having watched the birth of the Russian Duma with interest; and the sovereign, yielding to the national desire, granted a Constitution to his subjects in 1906.

Upon his death in February, 1907, his son, Mohammed Ali Shah, ascended the throne of Persia, and at his accession swore to uphold the Constitution. He did not, however, appreciate the curtailing of his powers by the National Assembly, or Majlis, and friction soon arose. In the December of 1907 he made an unsuccessful attempt to suppress it by force, and early in the next year his life was threatened with a bomb. Surrounded as he was by the Court camarilla, he could not realise that the country had awakened to Western ideas of progress, and in June, 1908, he took the extreme step of bombarding the Persian Parliament out of existence.

Upon this the important commercial city of Tabriz flung off its allegiance to the Shah, turned out the

Royalist troops, and, under the leadership of the bandit Sattar Khan, sustained a long siege.

Mohammed Ali's soldiers, sent to take the city, deserted to the Nationalist party, and the monarch was obliged to have recourse to the wild Kurdish tribes. Tabriz, however, held out until the April of 1909, when the Russian troops raised the siege in order to protect the lives of the Europeans in the town.

Throughout the struggle between the Shah and his subjects it was noticeable that the Persians proper did little material service to the Nationalist cause, which was largely supported by revolutionaries from the Caucasus and by the fighting hill-tribes. Chief among these latter were the Bakhtiari, who first took possession of the city of Isfahan and at last marched on Tehran.

The Shah, who was strongly urged by both the British and Russian representatives to restore the Constitution, broke his solemn promises again and again, and apparently entirely failed to grasp the situation until it was too late.

The Sipahdar (Commander-in-Chief), who belongs to the Royal Family, cast in his lot with the Nationalist party, and threatened Tehran from the north; while the Sardar-i-Assad (brother of the chief of the Bakhtiari) led his warlike tribesmen up from the south to invest the capital. Mohammed Ali, perhaps warned by the fate of the ex-Sultan of Turkey, did not await the result. He took refuge in the summer quarters of the Russian Legation outside the city, and by this step virtually abdicated.

On July 16, 1909, he was formally deposed by the

National Council, and his son, a boy of eleven, elected Shah in his stead. The supreme power rested in the hands of the Sipahdar and the Sardar-i-Assad, both men being imbued with Western ideas. After considerable haggling as to the allowance to be made to the ex-Shah, and after much discussion on the question of the Crown jewels, his Majesty finally left the capital on September 10th, and made his way by leisurely stages to the Caspian. In future he is to be the guest of the Russian Government, either at Odessa or in the Crimea.

It is too soon to judge how the change from an autocratic rule to that of a Constitutional Government will work; but owing to the agreement of 1907 between England and Russia, Persia has every chance of working out her own salvation. Whatever may be our opinion of the decadence of Persia at the present day, surely an empire which took its rise some five centuries before Christ, and is an independent kingdom in the twentieth century after Christ, must hold within it the elements of renewal? That Persia may succeed in her arduous task of regeneration is the earnest wish of all Englishmen who take any interest in the country.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SHAH, HIS CAPITAL AND GOVERNMENT

**D**URING the twenty-five centuries in which Persia has been a kingdom, her rulers have fixed their capitals at different points within the limits of their empire. Ecbatana (meaning Treasure-house) was one of the capitals of the Medes, and the summer dwelling-place of the Achæmenian monarchs. This city, with its wonderful palace, Deioces, is supposed by many writers to have occupied the site of the modern Hamadan, a town in north-west Persia. There are, however, no monuments or ruins in the town, save a battered stone lion; and the small eminence called the Musalla, on which formerly stood the citadel, would not have afforded sufficient space for the great palace. However, Hamadan clings to the idea that it occupies the site of past glories, and it has a large colony of Jews, who show the so-called tombs of Esther and Mordecai to travellers.

Cyrus the Great built Pasargadæ for his capital, the ruins that still remain testifying to its former grandeur; but Darius and his successors selected Persepolis as a site for their palaces. Shushan in Arabistan, where Artaxerxes Longimanus, generally identified with the magnificent Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, held his

Court, was inhabited in the winter by the Achæmenian monarchs.

Alexander ruled from Babylon, and the Parthians fixed their seat of government at Ctesiphon on the Tigris, where the Sasanian potentate Khosru I. built a splendid palace, an arch of which still stands.

Here these monarchs held their Court in almost unbelievable luxury, calling themselves by such titles as "King of Kings," "Lord of Lords," "Glorious beyond all compare," or "A God among mortals." The Shahs of to-day have borrowed many of these proud epithets, which are now yet more baseless than they were in earlier times. They testify to the belief in "Divine Right of Kings," so firmly implanted in the Persians that even now with ideas of liberty and progress in the air the mass of the people hold to it.

After the Mohammedan conquest, the Khalifs held their Court at Baghdad, and Persia was a conquered country, a mere appanage of the Khalifate and ruled by aliens for eight hundred years, until at last the Sefavean dynasty arose. Great Shah Abbas selected Isfahan for his capital, and he and his successors improved and beautified the city, Sir Anthony Sherley and Chardin giving us accounts of its splendours. In 1722 it was sacked by the Afghans and never regained its prosperity, Nadir Shah, who delivered it, preferring Meshed as his place of residence, and the Zend dynasty making Shiraz into their seat of government. On the rise of the present Kajar dynasty, its founder, Agha Mohammed Khan, took Tehran for his capital in order to keep in touch with the Turkish tribe from which he had sprung, and Tabriz in Azerbaijan, the old



capital of the kings of Armenia, became the home of the Vali Ahd, or Crown Prince, during the lifetime of the Shah, in order to prevent the intrigues that would focus round the heir apparent did he live at the Court.

The traveller from Europe going to Tehran can either caravan from Erzeroum *viâ* Erivan and Tabriz, or take steamer from Marseilles to Batoum on the Black Sea, from which port a line runs through the Caucasus past Tiflis to Baku on the Caspian. Here a Russian packet-boat takes him in about thirty hours to Enzeli, the port for Tehran; but if the weather be rough it will be impossible to land the passengers and cargo in a small launch across the sand-bar that blocks the mouth of the harbour. In such a case the packet will return to Baku, and every one will be obliged to start afresh from the city of petroleum. When the traveller has landed in safety at Enzeli he will be surprised at the appearance of the port of Persia's capital, the Shah's pavilion, built like a pagoda, being the only building of any pretensions, and the so-called hotel giving a mild foretaste of the discomforts that will be experienced later if the visitor is new to Oriental travel. A great lagoon, teeming with fish and waterfowl, must be crossed in a rickety native boat, after which the craft will turn into a sluggish river, on the banks of which snakes glide and tortoises crawl, and will deposit the traveller at Pir-i-Bazaar (Bazaar of the Old Woman). From here the Russians have engineered a fairly good road right up to the capital, and it is therefore possible to drive the two hundred odd miles to Tehran in thirty-six hours, with relays of horses.

At a short distance Resht looks strangely like an

English village with its red-tiled roofs buried in trees ; for Gilan is one of the wettest parts of Persia, and the mud-built houses in use elsewhere would not stand *in situ* for a week in this district on account of the incessant rain.

The "English" appearance of the town is still further carried out by the green fields and the hedges bordering the roads. But charming as the whole place looks on a sunny day, the curse of malaria hangs over it, and the experienced traveller doses himself with quinine, and is not surprised that the inhabitants have a sickly look when he sees the rice-fields in which men and women work knee-deep in water and from which rises a deadly miasma. The first part of his onward journey lies through a vast forest with long, grassy "rides" stretching away into the luxuriant vegetation, this wooded belt being part of the great jungle which reaches to Astrabad, and is in all some four hundred miles in length. Here are to be found tigers, panthers, boar, stags, and game of all kinds. But this is not Persia proper, and the traveller will soon reach the spurs of the Elburz range, which opposes a barrier between the sea and the Plateau, the second part of his journey consisting of a series of steep ascents and sharp descents, as the road winds upwards, and below him the river rushes impetuously along its bed. He has now left the trees, the waterfalls, the masses of fern, and the hampering mud behind him, and is in a sterile country with mountains rising up on all sides and barren of vegetation. The splendid colouring of the forest will have given place to a landscape tinted in shades of dun and ochre, but vaulted with a sky of the intense blue of the turquoise, and laved by an air

very different to the moist heat of the rainy zone. It is a keen, exhilarating air that courses like wine through his veins and makes him impervious to the jolts and jars of his carriage and his halts in rest-houses often swarming with vermin, and where practically no food is to be purchased.

The third part of his journey to the capital is across the great Plateau of Persia, which rises to a height of two thousand to six thousand feet, and stretches some eight hundred miles from north to south, and he will soon arrive at Kasvin, his first Persian town. In spite of its imposing gateway and its, for Persia, up-to-date hotel, the town has an air of desolation and decay, owing to the ruined appearance of its monuments. Not far from it is Alamut, the famous stronghold of Hasan-i-Sabbah, the Chief of the Assassins, who took Kasvin, and whose successors were given the title of "Old Man of the Mountain" by the Crusaders. There is a legend<sup>1</sup> that Hasan-i-Sabbah was at school with the poet Omar Khayyam, and the Nizam-i-Mulk the great Vizier of the Seljuks, and that the three comrades made a compact that the one who succeeded best in life should help the others. Therefore, when the Nizam-ul-Mulk was at the height of his power, his former school-fellows reminded him of his promise, Omar receiving from him a yearly pension and devoting himself to study, but Hasan-i-Sabbah demanding a post at Court which he used to try and compass the downfall of his benefactor. Being found out he fled, joined the sect of the Ismailis, and some

<sup>1</sup> Professor E. G. Browne ("Literary History of Persia") shows from chronological evidence that this picturesque story has no foundation in fact.

years later the great Vizier fell a victim to the dagger of one of Hasan's emissaries.

The Ismailis were a secret sect of the Shiah, its members on being initiated binding themselves by most solemn oaths to obey every command of their superiors, and professing that they were followers of Ismail, whom they regarded as the Seventh Imam. This creed found many supporters, and in 1071 young Hasan-i-Sabbah joined the faction and henceforth flung himself with all the force of his genius into the work of spreading the tenets of his faith far and wide, and undermining the power of Islam.

Devoted followers flocked to him, and some years later he actually seized Alamut, an almost impregnable stronghold near Kasvin, which became henceforth the centre of the Ismaili power; later on he took the city of Kasvin itself.

The followers of Hasan were called Assassins, the name said to be derived from their habit of taking the intoxicating drug *hashish*, or Indian hemp, and they became feared throughout the Mohammedan world, for no prominent man was secure from their daggers; they also killed harmless citizens at random to inspire terror of their order. Marco Polo, who gives an account of the Assassins, says that when a youth was recruited he was intoxicated with *hashish* and then conveyed to a lovely garden where he was tended by girls of surpassing beauty. When he recovered his senses he would find himself in the room in which he had been initiated, and he would be told by the "Old Man of the Mountain" (the Grand Master) that he had been vouchsafed a glimpse of the glories of the Paradise which was reserved for all true Ismailis after death. This

supposed vision nerved thousands to perform the most dangerous behests of their Master and also the most revolting ; for there is a gruesome legend of how an Ismaili, in the guise of a blind beggar, lured citizens of Isfahan night after night to a certain house where his accomplices, lying in wait, murdered and stripped their unfortunate victims. Up to the time of the Mongols, when Hulagu Khan took the fortress of Alamut, and utterly destroyed the power of the Assassins, these scourges of society pursued their evil work practically without let or hindrance.

When the traveller leaves Kasvin and drives southward the last ninety miles across the wide plain, he will admire the fine outline of the Elburz range, and suddenly, at a turn in the road, he will see Demavend, the mighty extinct volcano, its outline like the apex of a triangle, clearly silhouetted against the intense blue of the sky. The great peak will become almost a part of his life as long as he remains in Tehran, and he will observe it under countless aspects, one of the most beautiful being when its winter snows are flushed rose-red at sunset. The whole range will throb and palpitate with the unearthly light, until one after another the mountains lose their fairy radiance, and grow grey and cold : Demavend, however, retains a rosy coronet some moments after death, as it were, has overtaken the others.

At the distance, Tehran, built in great part of the mud on which it stands, is only distinguished from the surrounding plain by the green trees of its many gardens ; but as the traveller gets nearer he will see the outline of the castellated city wall and the tiled domes and minarets of mosques. He will enter the town by a grandiose gateway adorned with glazed bricks in

patterns, the prevailing tones being blue and yellow relieved with black and white, the whole giving a touch of splendour to its squalid surroundings. These gateways are twelve in number ; some are adorned with the exploits of Rustum, the Hercules and knight-errant of Persia, and others depict the Persian soldier of to-day—all of them, however, look best at a distance, and do not bear a close examination.

The roads, many of them of considerable width, have frequent holes, and there are waste spaces every here and there on which refuse of all kinds is deposited. Impenetrable high mud walls conceal all the better-class houses ; and the dress of the townsfolk is dingy, the long, much-kilted frock-coat, the baggy-kneed European trousers, and the fashionable elastic-sided boots not making for picturesqueness. The ladies, who add so much to the attractiveness of European cities, are huddled in Persia in a disguising and shapeless black wrap, by which the prettiest and the plainest are reduced to the same level.

The chief roads are broad with avenues of trees, but have big holes at intervals caused by the remarkable custom of digging up the public highway to get mud to make the sun-burnt bricks ; men carrying on their respective trades take up a good deal of the street ; and large convoys of donkeys, so laden with brushwood that only their legs are visible, totter along with an absolute disregard to the rest of the traffic. Perhaps a riderless horse may canter by on its way to the stable, some Persian having left it outside the house at which he was visiting without troubling to tether it.

In November there is usually quite a "rainy season" in Tehran, the climate, so say the natives, having

become much moister since the planting of many avenues of trees, and the laying-out of numerous gardens, both in the town and its environs. At this time the roads are almost impassable for pedestrians, who take to wearing galoshes as they splash through mire of the consistency of pea-soup ; and it is pitiable to see the women flip-flapping along in the sea of liquid mud, their heelless slippers being small protection against the wet. At Tehran, as in all Persian towns, it is inadvisable for any European woman to walk about alone and unattended, as she would be liable to insult from the populace ; and if she were riding, Persians galloping past might perhaps collide with her in hopes of unhorsing her.

In the narrow, vaulted passages of the bazaars, many of which have most beautifully tiled and honeycombed stucco roofs, the laden animals jostle one another, and the passers-by have to be on the alert unless they wish to be knocked down. Russian and Austrian goods predominate, and the traveller in search of curios will not find any here. *Dellals*, or dealers, however, are certain to visit him, bringing carpets for his inspection ; and opening knotted cloths they will produce old velvets and embroideries, *papier maché* pictures, or enamel plaques. If he sees anything he particularly fancies he had better come to terms with the *dellal*, for in all probability it is unique. As time is of no object in Persia, bargaining is a lengthy business, and the haggling needs patience and good temper : sometimes weeks of discussion ensue before some valuable *objet d'art* can pass into the possession of the would-be purchaser, the price demanded at first being a preposterous one.

A curious Persian custom about buying and selling

is that the purchaser can return within three days the horse or carpet that he has bought, getting the money back that he has paid for it. In the same way the seller can retrieve what he has sold within the same limit of time if he happen to change his mind. Thus, if a European has purchased something much to his taste, probably having wasted several hours in haggling over the price, he cannot feel sure of possession until the fourth day.

Though Tehran is an ancient city, yet it was never of any importance until Agha Mohammed Khan selected it in 1788 as his capital, therefore it is deficient in the interesting mosques and other monuments of older towns. Fath Ali Shah did something for his capital ; but it owes its present appearance principally to Nasr-ed-Din Shah, who enclosed the city with a new wall and moat having a circuit of eleven miles and pierced with imposing gateways. The town boasts some fine squares, chief of which is the Tup Meidan, or Gun Square, where stands the Arsenal, guarded by most obsolete cannon. Here are the Artillery barracks, the walls ornamented with rough representations of the "Lion and the Sun" on a red ground, and the Imperial Bank of Persia, with a charmingly coloured stucco façade. The Europeans until lately were in the habit of playing polo in the Meidan-i-Mashk, next to this square, the game always attracting a crowd of onlookers, among which were many soldiers in the shabbiest of uniforms and with a lounging gait that showed them to be sorely in need of the drill-sergeant.

The so-called Boulevard des Ambassadeurs, the pride of the city, is a broad avenue planted with poplars and lit with lamps of the kind that make darkness visible.



Here are several of the Legations, the most imposing of which is the British with its campanile-like clock-tower. This building, together with four substantial-looking houses quite English in appearance, is placed in a lovely garden, through which runs perhaps the most delicious water in Persia, the traveller in Iran becoming quite a *connoisseur* in water after he has experienced the countless varieties of good and bad, mostly the latter, of which the country is prolific.

Not far from the British Legation is the Nigaristan, the favourite palace of Fath Ali Shah, its name meaning Picture Gallery, from the collection of portraits of its builder and his relatives, the handsome Kajar princes all having a strong family resemblance to one another. Every visitor observes a long slide leading to the edge of a great marble bath, and is amused when he is told that the many ladies favoured by Fath Ali Shah used to "toboggan" down this descent with roulades of laughter into the embrace of the long-bearded sovereign waiting at the bottom.

Next in importance to the Artillery Square is the Meidan-i-Shah, with its great octagonal tank of water, near which is a huge brass cannon used as *bast*, or sanctuary, for the criminals of Tehran, who are also wont to resort to the flagstaff or stables of the British Legation, as well as to the mosques. Above the gateway leading from this square is the Nagara-Khana, or Drum House, where at sunrise and sunset is performed barbarous music, the custom, which is also in force at Meshed, and other large cities, dating from Zoroastrian times. It is one of the prerogatives of royalty, and as such it honours the Shah in his capital, and the Holy Imam Reza in his world-famous shrine in the City of Martyrdom.

At this point we are close to the large group of palace-buildings, and it may be well to introduce the Shah to our readers.

Up to 1906, at which date Muzaffer-ed-Din Shah gave a Constitution to his subjects, the King of Persia was an absolute monarch, only subject to the law of Islam. He had the power of life and death over all, and in theory everything was his property, save the land belonging to the Church.

Mohammed Ali Shah succeeded his father to the proud title of "Shah in Shah" or "King of Kings," in January, 1907; but inherited a much-impooverished treasury, his grandfather, and yet more his father, having exhausted the exchequer by their expensive visits to Europe.

As every one knows, Mohammed Ali Shah revoked the Constitution which, on his accession, he swore to support, threw his country into a state of civil war, and was deposed July, 1909. Therefore it will be better to describe the Shah and his Court as they were a few years ago, rather than what they are actually at the present moment.

The King of Persia styles himself by such high-sounding titles as "The Point of Adoration of the Universe," "The Shadow of Allah," "The Asylum of the World" and so on; but for all his great position, he has never been the spiritual head of Islam, which is the prerogative of the Sultan of Turkey, and his rule over his subjects has always had checks in the power of the priesthood.

The Achæmenian and Sasanian monarchs lived in almost fabulous splendour; but at the present day the Shah's Court is shorn of much of its former glory, and

the monarch himself in the long, much-pleated frock-coat and trousers borrowed from the West, is not a particularly imposing figure, even though large rubies and diamonds may adorn his breast, and he may carry a diamond-studded plume in the front of his black lambs'-wool hat.

As can be gathered from the following description, he makes a far less impressive appearance than his ancestor Fath Ali Shah, of whom Sir John Malcolm<sup>1</sup> wrote, when on a mission to the Court of Persia in 1800,—“The ground of his robes was white, but he was so covered with jewels of an extraordinary size, and their splendour from his being seated where the rays of the sun played upon them, was so dazzling that it was impossible to distinguish the minute parts which combined to give such amazing brilliancy to his whole figure.”

Even now Persian courtiers mendaciously assert that the glorious appearance of their royal master almost blinds them; but in those days they would have had more reason for their attitude of abject humility than now.

Everything is done to keep alive a feeling of reverence for the Shah, the recipient of any royal missive or gift placing it on his head and to his eyes, and then kissing it. As an example of this respect, when at Meshed in the spring of 1908, the writer was one day surprised to hear many salvoes of artillery, and on inquiry was told that the Shah had sent his portrait (merely an enlarged photo) to the Governor of the city. This was the method of notifying its presence to the populace (not its arrival, as it had

<sup>1</sup> “Persian Sketches.”

come some time before, but the Governor had laid it by until the omens were propitious for its display!).

The Shah's courtiers may be called upon to do menial offices for their master, such as massaging him, kneading his limbs, and even making a *pilau* or sherbet for him. The monarch always eats alone, all his food being examined by a doctor and tasted beforehand for fear of poison, and the courtiers stand round the room in silence.

When the sovereign has eaten, and left the apartment, the princes of the blood take their places on the carpets on which the meal is laid, and after they have regaled themselves the courtiers follow. Last of all the servants finish what is left of the ample repast, and drink the remains of the iced sherbets.

The Shah's palace, called the *ark*, or citadel, is situated in the centre of his capital, and composed of groups of buildings, courtyards, and gardens, covering a space about a quarter of a square mile and all enclosed within high walls.

The royal jewels and precious objects of all kinds are kept in a large hall, and may be inspected by visitors. Here are heaps of pearls, many of great size, diamonds and rubies galore, and the famous *jika*, or diamond aigrette, worn by the Shah on State occasions. A wonderful gold globe is shown with the different countries of the world composed of gems, Persia being inlaid with turquoise, the only precious stone found in the empire; and the whole work of art is said to be worth £947,000. The great diamond, the Darya-i-Nur (Sea of Light), which together with our Kuh-i-Nur (Mountain of Light) was taken by Nadir-Shah at the sack of Delhi, is kept here. The latter diamond at

Nadir's death found its way to Afghanistan, and thence to India, falling into the hands of the English in 1850.

A splendidly jewelled and enamelled throne stands in this hall, and Lord Curzon<sup>1</sup> discovered that it is partly made from the broken remains of the celebrated "Peacock" throne of Aurungzebe. He has also proved that the gem-studded throne which goes by that name (Takht-i-Taous) and which many writers believe to be the original work of art that Nadir Shah brought back with the almost fabulous loot of Delhi, is of no earlier date than the time of Fath Ali Shah, and was made at the command of that monarch. It is doubtful whether all these jewels still repose in the great gallery, because rumours are rife that Mohammed Ali Shah was obliged to make inroads on his treasures in order to pay his troops.

At the great Persian festival of No Ruz (New Year's Day), when the sun passes into the sign of the Ram on March 21st, the Shah shows himself to his subjects—who are all clad in new garments—much as did the Achæmenian and Sasanian monarchs.

He appears in the Throne Room, a hall beautifully decorated with mirror-work, and seats himself, *à la Persane*, on an elaborately carved platform of white marble. The curtains covering an immense window are drawn back in order that the admiring populace who fill the great courtyard may gaze on their monarch before whom they prostrate themselves to the earth, and from whom they receive largesse in the shape of gold coins. A poet recites an ode in His Majesty's praise, for which he is given a robe of honour; bands

<sup>1</sup> "Persia."

play different airs at the same time ; wrestlers, acrobats, and conjurers perform, and the ill-used Jews are ducked again and again in the tanks amid the merriment of the crowd.

The courtiers, who have given New Year's gifts of money to their sovereign, are clad in sumptuous garments and turbans of Kerman shawls, and with red-stockinged feet stand around in solemn silence, adorned with many orders. The foreign ministers are received in audience by the monarch on this day of universal rejoicing, which was instituted in Zoroastrian times or even earlier. It is a day when gifts are given and received, servants, for example, getting new clothes and a month's wages. If, however, No Ruz should chance to fall during a month of mourning, such as Muharram or Ramazan, there is practically no gaiety, the bazaars are not decorated, and there will be no joyous crowd issuing from the city gates, no paying of visits and feasting. All will be much as usual, the countless sugar-loaves and platters of sweetmeats which the foreigner connects with No Ruz being conspicuous by their absence.

The Shah, who must be of the Shiah faith, can, according to Mohammedan law, have only four wives ; but as many *sigebs*, or temporary wives, and slaves as he pleases. The enormous expense of the always large *anderoon* of a monarch does much to impoverish the country ; for all the favourites inhabit separate pavilions and have their own servants and carriages. When the royal ladies, who have such high-sounding titles as "The Gaiety of the Empire," "The Delight of the Realm," and so on, drive out, it is customary for every Persian to turn his back on the

equipages and stand with his face to the wall or, if possible, disappear down a side-street, as otherwise he may be roughly handled by the eunuchs in attendance.

The monarch has the right to enter every *anderoon* in his kingdom, his royal glance being supposed to confer good luck on the women on whom it falls. Should he happen to take a fancy to any man's wife, the loyal husband will be obliged to divorce the lady in the potentate's favour, and will also present him with any beautiful slave whom he may admire.

During the royal progresses, villagers with handsome daughters bring the girls to the Shah's notice as he passes, hoping that the sovereign may order them to be put among the women of the *anderoon*, where there are chances of rising to high position. For example, the mother of the present Zil-i-Sultan (the little Shah's great-uncle) was a Kurdish peasant-girl. However, by Persian law, the mother of the Shah must be of the blood-royal, therefore this prince was obliged to give place to his younger brother in the succession to the throne.

Speaking of these progresses, the country through which the Shah and his enormous following pass is practically denuded of food of every kind, the sovereign's servants commandeering everything without paying for it, just as if they were in an enemy's land. It frequently happens that the governor of a province will pay the monarch a large sum on the understanding that the district in question should not be included in the royal tour.

When the Shah becomes tired of any one of his wives, who is probably no longer young enough to please him, he gets rid of her gracefully by marrying her to some official, whether the gentleman in question

may desire the honour or not. The lady becomes the head of the household of her new husband, and if she pleases may compel him to divorce his wife or wives in her favour, leaving her to rule alone; and such alliances constitute some of the few exceptions where the Persian woman asserts herself.

The writer had the privilege of being present at a party given by one of the royal favourites, and the richness of the ungraceful costumes and the profusion of the jewels that adorned the crowds of Court ladies who were invited, were a wonderful sight. All were interested in their European guests, fingering their furs, eyeing their clothes, and trying to engage them in conversation, during which handsomely clad women-servants handed round relays of tea and sweetmeats. Then the Shah came in, and the busy hum of talk ceased entirely, every fair Persian preening herself, and doing her best to catch the monarch's eye as he strode across the room. However, he paid no attention to any of his countrywomen, but was eager to inspect the foreign ladies present, with whom he shook hands and did his best to converse in indifferent French.

The Shah has many palaces outside the walls of Tehran, perhaps the most noticeable being the hunting-box of Doshan Tepé (Palace of a Hare) situated on a rocky spur, a couple of miles from the city. At the foot of the hill the Persian Zoo is housed. This menagerie is small, and the smell of the animals, which are ill-kept, is disagreeable. But there are Persian lions, tigers, leopards, and bears to be seen, and the captives at the time of the writer's visit appeared to be on excellent terms with one of the keepers, who evidently had a "way" with his charges.



Another palace is the white, barrack-looking building of Kasr-i-Kajar (Castle of the Kajar), which Nasr-ed-Din Shah, on returning from his first visit to Europe, is reported to have compared to Windsor Castle, to the disadvantage of the latter. It stands on the gravel slope of Shimran, at a great height on the top of a series of terraces, and below is a large lake on which the European colony enjoy excellent skating when the winter is severe.

In the environs of Tehran there are charming villages to which the foreign ministers and their staffs retire during the heat of summer. The British Legation has a residence in a delightful garden with running water and a big bathing-tank at Gulahek, some six miles north of the capital. Mohammed Shah, besides presenting the garden to the minister then at Tehran, gave him the rights of a landlord over the villagers, who pay their taxes to the British, and have other privileges. Russia has the village of Zargandeh on the same terms.

When the Shah goes out he is attended by runners, picturesque in scarlet and gold, and carrying peacock's feathers in their curious turreted hats which are supposed to be reminiscent of the crowns of the kings and princes who were conquered by the Sasanian monarchs.

If the Shah is riding, his charger will have a golden, gem-studded collar and trappings of gold, and his *gholams*, or bodyguards, have broad silver bands round the necks of their steeds, one of the prerogatives of royalty being the right to dye the tails of the horses with henna. But Muzaffer-ed-Din Shah usually drove in a large brougham, and the ex-Shah, Mohammed Ali,

favoured the motor-car, a vehicle ill-fitted to run on what go by the name of roads in Persia.

The monarch has a huge surrounding of obsequious courtiers, who remain standing when he is seated, answer his questions in low tones, agree with him on every point, and flatter him in a manner outrageous to European ears. The Vizier, or Prime Minister; the Chamberlain; the Treasurer; the Master of Horse; the Chief Carpet Spreader, and the Chief Executioner are only a few among a crowd of dignitaries, most of whom rely much upon their wits for a livelihood. Even if their salaries are paid, they have probably given large sums to the Shah for their posts; therefore they "squeeze" their underlings, and take bribes from those of the outer world who may want some favour from the sovereign.

*Modakhel*, or commission, is a word with which the European speedily becomes very familiar. It means that every one, from the highest in the land to the lowest, takes what percentage he can from any money passing through his hands. The Shah, at the head, farms out the provinces of his realm at No Ruz to the highest bidders; and the man who has hired a province, hurries to his miniature kingdom and extorts money on his arrival from all the rich inhabitants under his rule. Some intrigue at the capital may oust him from his position before the year is out, therefore his great aim is to recoup himself and make a handsome sum over and above his outlay in the shortest possible time. It may easily be understood that no governor would think of repairing bridges, making roads, or improving his province under such a system—in fact, he spends as little as possible. During his tenure of office he has supreme power, his Court being well-nigh

as hedged in with ceremony as is that of the Shah itself, and his suite do their share in extorting money from the townsfolk. These latter probably "grind the faces" of their apprentices in their turn; and the lowest servant in Persia will make his *modakhel* on the smallest article purchased for his employer. It is even said that the Shah, the supreme Fount of Justice in the kingdom, extorts a commission from any criminal whom he may have pardoned! In short, practically every office is sold in Persia, and practically every official is corrupt.

The tomb of a governor of a district in south Persia is actually treated as a shrine at which the inhabitants worship because the dead man when in power never robbed the poor! It is to be hoped that as time goes on the National Council will call many such saints into being; but at present they are evidently not common.

In Persia all government is *personal*, an able monarch, such as great Shah Abbas, raising his country to a high pitch of prosperity. If, however, a king has an enlightened minister the latter's tenure of office is always precarious, because there is certain to be a powerful party at Court who will try to influence the Shah against him by stirring up the jealousy of the monarch or playing on his fears, and as a rule, the Vizier will be disgraced or put to death. There is no permanence in the policy of these autocrats: for if a beneficent Shah have an incompetent successor, all the good that the former has done will be lost.

Of late years the burden of taxation has fallen almost entirely on the tradespeople and the peasantry; the kingdom grows steadily poorer as the years pass; all

is bribery and dishonesty, and the eyes of the Shah are blinded by the Court camarilla that always surround him and endeavour to keep the truth from reaching him.

The army, the bulwark of his throne, is disgracefully paid, clothed and fed, with the exception of the so-called Cossack regiments at Tehran in which Persians have been drilled by Russians to a pitch of efficiency, and are the only properly paid troops in the kingdom. As a rule the officers "eat" the pay of the soldiery, and in their turn their salaries are "eaten" by the Commander-in-Chief; and so it goes on.

The ordinary Persian *serbaz*, dirty, ragged, and slouching, carrying on the trade of a money-changer to enable him to eke out his scanty pay, has nothing martial about him, and usually distinguishes himself in action by a display of cowardice; but this is not to be wondered at, for his officers are tarred with the same brush. On the march each soldier has a diminutive donkey, which carries his kit and rifle, and on which he rides at intervals, turning the animal into the springing crops to feed whenever there is a halt. As there is no commissariat department, the soldiers loot food from the luckless villagers, who have no redress. When the writer accompanied a British and Persian Frontier Commission in Baluchistan, she noticed that the country people retired at its approach, leaving their houses absolutely bare, in order to escape being forced to supply provisions gratis.

Lord Curzon<sup>1</sup> sums up the subject of the Persian soldier in the following words: "A more irregular army, in the most literal sense of the word, does not

<sup>1</sup> "Persia."

exist on the face of the globe. Irregular in its enlistment, dress, arms, ammunition, discipline, and service, it would be strange if its conduct were not irregular also."

The petrifying form of education in vogue does not help the nation; for it must stultify, rather than expand the intellect to be forced to read the Koran in Arabic probably without understanding a word of the sacred book. The *madressehs*, or colleges, endowed by the pious, are to instruct youths wishing to become priests, doctors, or judges. But as these educational centres are in the hands of the priests, no Western knowledge is taught, the whole teaching given being based upon the Koran, ingenious dissertations upon its many obscure passages being dignified by the name of philosophy. Here arguments take place as little to edification as the well-known discussion of the mediæval Schoolmen as to how many angels could accommodate themselves upon the point of a needle!

Nasr-ed-Din Shah started a Polytechnic School at Tehran where European instructors impart Western teaching; and there are also military colleges conducted by Austrians at Tehran and Tabriz; but these are merely a gleam of light in the universal darkness.

Justice in Persia is administered by the governors and their representatives and by the priesthood. The *urf*, or unwritten law, is that administered by the laity; but the priests confine themselves to the *shar* (the written or divine law—in other words, the Koran).

Justice is usually summary; no witness is asked to take an oath, and false testimony is common. Both sides bribe to the extent of their resources, and he who has the longest purse will usually win his case, unless

he is so obviously in the wrong that the governor fears public opinion, or the priesthood, usually in opposition, supports the cause of the poorer claimant. The evidence taken is often of the flimsiest character. For example, if a man were accused of stealing, and a bit of rag found near the spot tallied with the supposed culprit's clothing, this would be considered sufficient evidence to condemn the perhaps innocent prisoner to the loss of a hand for theft.

Any one suspected of a crime is frequently tortured to force a confession, and in the towns is imprisoned and half-starved by his jailer whom he has to pay for his food. Law is as a rule cheap and speedy; but where money is in question, the governor will take his share when he has adjudicated. Although in theory all have a right of appeal to the Shah, yet few avail themselves of the privilege, knowing that in such a case everything would in all probability be swallowed up by the royal judge and his courtiers.

Any small case in the country is settled by the *kedkhoda*, or headman of the village, who is assisted by the greybeards of the hamlet. No women are ever imprisoned, although if mixed up in a crime they will probably be poisoned, but from the retirement in which they live such cases are of the rarest.

This is an attempt to depict the Shah and his methods of government as they were until lately; but it is to be hoped that both may undergo modification in the near future, and that Persia may have in herself the seeds of a new and vigorous life.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PERSIAN MAN

FROM the cradle to the grave—nay, even in the life beyond the grave—the balance weighs heavily in favour of the Persian man as compared with the Persian woman. “He that has no son has no light in his eyes,” runs the saying, and it is looked upon as a disgrace if a man has not an heir to carry on his name.

When a baby-boy, born of well-to-do parents, comes into the world, he is bedded in a silken cradle and arrayed in embroidered garments, and the proud nurse who carries him into the presence of his father will receive a gift. The position of his mother with her husband will be greatly improved by his arrival, and a big feast will be given in his honour, at which friends, priests, and beggars will be fed, and musicians and dancers will entertain the guests.

The baby will be hung with amulets to preserve him from the influence of the “evil eye,” one of these charms consisting of a turquoise struck into a sheep’s eye brought from Mecca, at the time of the annual sacrifice. When his nurse takes him for an airing, the clothes in which he is swaddled so tightly that he can only move his head and hands, will be of coarse

material, this ruse being adopted to prevent passers-by from commenting on his beauty. Were their eyes drawn towards him, attracted by fine garments, they might utter some expression of admiration, which, if they forgot to couple it with the saving *Mashallah* (God is great), would almost certainly bring sickness upon the luckless infant. If the child happen to have convulsions during teething, an infallible remedy is to hang from its neck a strip of calico the exact length of the little patient and inscribed by a *mulla* with texts from the Koran ; but as this costs a sovereign it is never used for girls.

At about eight years old, the boy is more or less separated from his mother and sisters, and put in charge of men-servants, a priest undertaking his education, which consists for the most part in learning to read and write and to recite the Koran. The sacred book of Islam is written in Arabic, and as no attempt is made to explain to the boy the meaning of what he is reading, this method of instruction cannot do much to develop the mind. Xenophon wrote that the youths of Persia were taught justice in their schools together with the arts of hurling the dart and shooting with the bow, and this, coupled with Herodotus' saying that all Persians were trained to ride, to shoot, and to speak the truth, seems a much better type of education than that which is in vogue at the present day.

It is curious to see a group of scholars sitting on their heels round their master, swaying their bodies to fro, and all reciting in a sing-song and at the pitch of their voices what perhaps the teacher himself is unable to translate. Or they are being instructed in the rudiments of writing, resting their paper on the right knee



and beginning at the *right*-hand side with their reed pens, there being no slates in Persia.

Caligraphy may be classed as one of the fine arts, so greatly is it esteemed, even though at the present day it has been more or less superseded by printing. It resembles drawing rather than writing, and a letter is inscribed on a piece of very shiny paper, cut to the required size and held in the hand. If the paper prove too small, the margin always left on the right will be used, and if the writer happen to make a mistake he will lick off the Indian ink letters with his tongue. He does not write his signature, but rubs some ink on to a seal with which he presses the paper. Even an educated Persian will take some time to decipher a missive, the reason being that the dots and tiny signs which differentiate the letters of the alphabet, and are always printed, are invariably left out in writing.

If a boy prove idle or stupid at his tasks, he will be forced to "eat sticks," a Persian expression for the bastinado, the national punishment to which the highest in the land as well as the lowest may be subjected, and which is not regarded in any way as a disgrace. In his hours of recreation the child of rich parents is put in the charge of a *lala*, or pedagogue, usually an old man, who discourages animal spirits of any kind, and impresses on his young companion that it is undignified to run, or jump or frolic.

The boy's dress is a man's in miniature—the same European trousers, vest of Kerman shawl, frock-coat much kilted at the waist (the tightly fitting short coat of an Englishman being considered indecorous), and the astrachan *kolah*, or hat. And as he is a replica of his father as regards his clothes, he endeavours to

be the same in his manners, copying the courtly terms of speech and compliments of the "grown-ups," and learning the right mode of address to royalties, officials, dignitaries of the Church, merchants, and so on, together with the complicated Persian etiquette.

Later on he will accompany his parent when visiting, speaking of himself as the *bandeh*, or slave, of any superior, and will deal out compliments such as "May your nose be fat," "May your shadow never grow less," in proportion to the rank of the recipient, soon grasping that a man looks upon it as a sarcasm if he receives more than his due. He must also know the proper position to take when asked by his host to seat himself upon the carpet; for there are no chairs in common use, and all kneel and sit back on their heels, to the great detriment of the fit of their trousers.

The youth, moreover, must note the ceremonial connected with the going-round of the *kalian*, or water-pipe, observing how each guest takes it in order of rank, but makes a gesture of passing it to his neighbour, and waits for the latter's refusal before putting the tube to his own lips. When he takes his leave he must remember to put his right foot first into the slippers which he and all those present left at the door on entering.

The Persian youth rides as if he had been born in the saddle, but his idea of equitation is to rush madly at full speed, spurring his horse with the sharp points of his shovel-stirrups, yelling to it, and then pulling it back suddenly on to its haunches with the severe Persian bit. His spurts of fiery energy will probably be succeeded by days of idleness, in which he will



PERSIAN SCHOOL—BASTINADO FOR AN UNRULY PUPIL



spend many hours in visiting his friends, sipping innumerable cups of tea—the national drink—and smoking *kaians*. It will indeed be well if he obeys the precept of the Prophet and refrains from wine and games of chance, and merely smokes Shirazi tobacco instead of the opium and *hashish*, now sadly common among the *jeunesse d'brée* of Persia.

The idea of having a career is not one that finds favour with young men in a land where to do nothing gracefully is a fine art. Certainly there is not much open to a youth save minor positions at the Court of the Shah or acting as a hanger-on to some governor of a province or high official, such sinecures being spoken of as “doing service.”

If of the merchant class or the son of a priest, a craftsman, or a peasant, a man will in all probability succeed his father in his occupation. But a nation which counts time as of no value, and whose favourite expressions are *Furda inshallah* (To-morrow, please God!) and *Aib ne daret* (It doesn't matter), would look upon the “strenuous life” as a kind of lunacy.

And here a few words must be said about the Persian servant to whom his master confides his sons at an early age. Domestics are fed and clothed by their employers, dressing so much like them that foreigners new to the country might find it difficult to distinguish a master from his dependents were it not for the humble air of the latter and their habit of hiding their hands in their sleeves. They are supposed to receive wages in cash, but as that commodity is scarce in Persia they often have to depend on the commission of 10 per cent. which they take on everything that they purchase for the household. Besides this, if a master sends a present,

the servant selected to carry it receives the value of the article in money from the recipient. This is a custom which Europeans often find inconvenient, as they are apt, on their arrival in Persia, to be overwhelmed with gifts for which they will, *nolens volens*, have to pay far more than they are worth.

Juvenile Persians play with the children of the servants, one of whom may be educated by the *mulla* with the sons of the family, partaking in the amusements of the latter and following his young masters on horseback after gazelle and partridge. A gentleman visiting a house will always speak to the head-servant of his host, and it is a particular mark of friendship to the latter to send his retainer on some trifling errand, this being looked upon as a great compliment from a superior when visiting an inferior. The servants break into the conversation at intervals, the guests often refer to them, and they are expected to bring home all the gossip of the bazaars with which to regale their employers. In fact they are part and parcel of the family, look upon their master as a kind of father, care for his interests, are called by him *batchaha* (children), and hold perhaps a better position than that of the poor relatives and hangers-on to be found in so many households. Talking of servants leads on to slaves, and, strange though it may seem, Persia is the Paradise of that unhappy class. Though their owners have power of life and death over them, Persians say that as slaves are costly to buy they must be well treated and given no hard work to do; moreover, as they have no home of their own all their interest is sure to be centred in that of their adoption, therefore they can be trusted far more than any servant.

Owing to the vigorous way in which Great Britain has put down the slave trade in the Persian Gulf, negroes and negresses are expensive, though many are still introduced by the pilgrims from Mecca. As a rule they become much attached to their owners, who leave everything in their care without hesitation, and slaves often get considerable wealth if in the household of a man of position, but hardly ever wish to purchase their freedom. If a negress has a child by her master she becomes free, and her boy or girl will be brought up with the other children of the family and probably will marry a Persian, an admixture of black blood being looked upon as no degradation.

The day of a well-to-do Persian is somewhat as follows. He will be roused before sunrise by the call of the *muezzin*, his servant not daring to wake him, as it is a sin to disturb the slumbers of the Faithful. The clear voice rings from the *minar* of the mosque above the slumbering town or village, summoning all men to prayer in the following words:—

“God is great! There is no God but God! Mohammed is the Prophet of God! Come to prayers! Come to salvation! Come to good works! There is no other God but God! Prayers are better than sleep!”

These last words are only recited at dawn, and our Persian, flinging off his padded quilts, makes a speedy toilet by donning his coat and trousers, his undergarments being only renewed at the weekly bath. He exchanges his felt skull-cap for the orthodox tall, black lambs'-wool hat, as he is never seen with uncovered head, even in the intimacy of the family circle.

Water is then poured from a ewer over his hands, and he washes his face, his arms to the elbows, and his feet and ankles, before prostrating himself in devotion on his prayer-carpet, his face turned in the direction of the Kaaba at Mecca, and his forehead resting on a fragment of earth from the Holy City. Among other prayers he will recite the *Fatiha*, held in as great reverence by Moslems as is the Lord's Prayer by Christians, and used almost as often. It is the opening chapter of the Koran, and runs thus :—

“Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds !  
The Compassionate, the Merciful !  
King on the Day of Judgment !  
Thee do we worship and to Thee do we cry for help !  
Guide Thou us on the right path !  
The path of those to whom Thou art gracious !  
Not of those with whom Thou art angered,  
Nor of those who go astray !”<sup>1</sup>

His prayers and genuflexions (which are repeated again noon and at sunset) being accomplished, he drinks a glass of much-sweetened tea without milk. This he stirs with a silver spoon that is worked in filigree in order to take away the temptation of sipping from it, and thus committing the unlawful action of putting this metal into his mouth ; and when he has eaten a flabby cake of bread with some sweetmeats, and has smoked a water-pipe, he will be ready for the work of the day. The next meal is an ample repast served at noon, a leather cloth being laid on the ground, thin flaps of bread serving as plates and napkins, and *pilaus*, *chilaus*, *kabobs*, and sherbets making their appearance with plenty of fruit during

<sup>1</sup> Rodwell's translation of the Koran.



summer. The *pilau*, the national dish of Persia, is a mound of beautifully cooked rice mixed with clarified butter, bits of meat and different vegetables, and if served with a sauce of pomegranate juice and chopped almonds it is called a *fisenjan*. The *chilau kabob*, or *chef d'œuvre* of Persian cookery, is made from the thick part of a saddle of lamb, the tiny pieces of meat being steeped beforehand in vinegar and herbs and disposed on a mound of rice, raw eggs and butter being its accompaniments. *Kabobs* consist of pieces of lamb, fat, liver, and onion stuck alternately on skewers which are turned over a charcoal fire and then handed to the guests, all of whom eat far more rice and bread than meat. The sherbets are merely fruit syrups, those made of lime or pomegranate juice being most refreshing drinks in hot weather, and they are served in large bowls, in each of which is a big ladle, often exquisitely carved from pear-wood by the villagers of Abadeh. Every one drinks from the same spoon, but it is against etiquette to touch it with the lips. As there are no knives and forks, each man feeds himself with his fingers, moulding the rice with his right hand into a kind of sausage and manipulating it so cleverly that not a grain is dropped. After the meal, which is eaten in silence, is over, the servants pour rose-water over the greasy right hands of the party (it would be a gross breach of decorum to use both hands in feeding), and all then compose themselves for a siesta—a habit indulged in by the lowest as well as the highest, and which it is almost a crime to disturb. Tea, fruit, and sweetmeats appear to be taken at any time during the day, and the evening

meal after sunset is sometimes not served till nine o'clock.

If guests are invited to this they drink wine before dinner in defiance of the Prophet's prohibition, and apparently callous to his threat that his followers will be forced to expiate each draught by swallowing a peculiarly nauseous water in the next world. They nibble salted pistachio nuts, *nachod* (a kind of pea), and melon seeds, indulging in lively conversation until the meats arrive, and before partaking of these they must rinse their mouths and wash their hands clean of the forbidden wine.

As no Persian eats beef or pork, and there is no fish in the interior, the menu is practically mutton and fowls with sometimes game. The dishes already given repeat themselves year in, year out, with hardly any variation, though there is a profusion of fruit and vegetables to compensate for this monotony.

The moment dinner is over the guests depart, and those of the household prepare for bed, taking off their outer garments, throwing themselves on divans, and pulling *resais*, or padded cotton quilts, over them, head and all.

The public bath is used by a Persian as a club where he meets his friends and exchanges the gossip of the town, and he will be attended by his servant carrying towels, a change of linen, and jugs of cold water to pour over his master, when the latter has emerged from the hot tank. As water is a valuable commodity in Persia, the contents of the large tanks are not changed frequently, and a bather runs great risk of contracting infectious diseases in a low-class *hammam*. After the bath the hair is dyed a glossy blue-black with indigo

and henna, and the nails and finger-tips of the middle classes are tinted with the juice of the latter plant. The orthodox shave the top of the head, letting the back hair grow long, the idea being to leave two locks by which the angels who come to question a newly buried man, may carry him up to the realms of the Blessed if he is able to affirm that he is a good Mohammedan. Persians say that this custom of shaving the head is out of compliment to Ali, who was bald and who dyed his long beard. All men cultivate a moustache, a hairless upper lip being looked upon as effeminate, and at about thirty a short clipped beard is grown, which after the age of forty is never cut.

Friday is the Mohammedan equivalent to our Sunday, business being suspended in the bazaars, and after the bath orthodox Persians repair to the mosque for noonday prayer. Here there is no distinction made between rich and poor, a prince prostrating himself next the dirtiest beggar, and all looking toward the *meh'rab*, a recess which points in the direction of the sacred black stone built into the Kaaba at Mecca. This relic is supposed to have been brought by Abraham, and was held in such profound reverence in Mohammed's day, that the Reformer himself did homage to it, although he strictly prohibited the worship of idols of any kind.

The service and the portions of the Koran selected are all recited in Arabic, the *pishnamaz* or leader of the prayers in a mosque, taking the congregation through some thirteen invocations to God, each said with the body in a different attitude of devotion. Then the preacher mounts the step of his low pulpit and delivers the *khutbah*, or Friday oration — a kind

of sermon, which includes prayers for Mohammed, the "Companions," and the Shah, and which is delivered in Arabic.

When he arrives at a suitable age, the parents of a Persian youth busy themselves in arranging a marriage for him. Bachelors are looked down upon in Iran—in fact it is a disgrace for a man to die unwedded, and in such a case his funeral is spoken of in mockery as his marriage.

As a Persian has never seen the face of any lady save his relatives, he has no opportunity of choosing his wife and must leave the selection entirely to his mother. Unless he marries a cousin, recourse will probably be had to certain old women who act as go-betweens, telling the mothers of eligible sons about the dowry and charms of eligible daughters. Suppose a suitable girl be found, the would-be mother-in-law goes to inspect her, and if the young lady is adverse to the match, for she may have seen the youth on her rare outings, she will offer refreshments so rudely that the negotiations will be broken off in a hurry. This, however, seldom occurs, as a Persian girl is usually anxious to be married, and if all has gone smoothly she and her mother will drink tea at the house of the would-be *fiancé* who, hidden away, may perhaps get a glimpse of his future bride.

After this comes the public betrothal by the priest, at which the man is supposed to see the face of his bride for the first time, and has his one chance of drawing back at the price of paying to the girl's parents half the dowry that they would have given him with their daughter; but a man doing this is socially disgraced.

The betrothal and marriage take place in the house and not in the mosque. The hospitable Persians often saddle themselves with a heavy load of debt on these occasions, as the wedding festivities may last a whole week, during which there is much eating and drinking, musicians, dancers, and wrestlers being hired to entertain the numerous guests.

Four wives are allowed to each man by Mohammedan law, but owing partly to the poverty of the country and perhaps because of the worry of rival wives, polygamy is becoming rare in Iran, Persians even speaking of the custom as "unfashionable." "Two tigresses in a house are better than two mistresses," is a significant proverb; and indeed the jealousy that ensues in such a case may easily be imagined, and has been known to end in the death by poison of one of the wives or perhaps of the husband himself.

Owing to the seclusion of women, it is hardly possible for a wife to be a real companion to her husband. She may never be seen with him in public, she cannot discuss with him anything that is going on in the outside world, as her horizon is practically bounded by the walls of her own home, and she knows none of his friends nor he any of hers. Indeed, so strict is Persian etiquette that a man may only inquire about the health of his friend's family by the discreet term of *khana*, or the "house." The husband really manages the establishment, pays the servants, and checks the accounts of his steward and head groom, the wife being by no means a "helpmate" in the English sense of the word. The love of a Persian is bestowed on his children and on his parents, a man once telling the writer that it would be against nature for any one

to care for a wife as much as for a father or a mother.

The priest who educates a Persian advises him, as one of the cardinal rules of life, to do the exact contrary of what a woman counsels; therefore it can easily be understood that a man's opinion of women is by no means an exalted one, and the fact that a husband may introduce temporary wives to any extent into his household, lowers it still further. Polygamy frequently breeds hate between fathers and sons, and no real home-life is possible if a wife feels that she may be divorced at any moment.

When a Persian comes to the hour of death he is never left to die "in peace," according to the English idea, the room in which he lies being crowded with relatives and friends, all talking loudly, smoking *kallians*, and sipping tea at intervals.

As soon as he has breathed his last, with his face turned towards Mecca, his corpse is prepared for burial with camphor and spices, the interment taking place within twenty-four hours.

It is a time of hurry and confusion. All the water in the house is thrown away at once, in the belief that any one drinking it would be afflicted with colic; *mullas* recite portions of the Koran; and the hired mourners wail and beat their breasts, their aid being invoked because the Prophet forbade weeping on the part of relatives, as their dear ones were in a state of happiness. When the coffin arrives, friends crowd in to help to bear it to the cemetery. Many take turns in carrying the bier, this being a meritorious act, and the corpse is borne at a great pace to the graveyard, Mohammed

telling his followers to hasten their steps in order to give the righteous man happiness as soon as possible, or, in the case of an evil man, to get rid of his weight from off their shoulders. The deceased is placed in the coffin with his shroud loosened and two sticks under the armpits to enable him to raise himself when the two black angels, with their blue eyes, come to question him as to his orthodoxy. When the earth is shovelled over him and the bearers have repeated the *Fatiha* they depart in the belief that the angels are already settling the fate of their friend, and either enlarging his grave to the size of a room, or narrowing it so that he yells in anguish.

Even if the deceased is able to satisfy his inquisitors, he has still to pass the Bridge of Sirat, "finer than a hair and sharper than a sword," before he can reach Paradise. This bridge spans the fires of hell, and while the righteous pass over easily to the abode of the Blessed, the wicked fall headlong into the torments below.

On the third day after the burial the relatives of a dead man visit the grave and employ *mullas* to recite portions of the Koran ; this mourning is kept up for a week, much money being expended on the priests and on hired mourners.

If the deceased has been unable to go to Mecca in his lifetime his family will often actually pay some one to make the pilgrimage for his benefit, the pilgrim accruing no advantage to himself. If it be possible the dead man will be interred in the precincts of a shrine, being practically sure of heaven in such a holy resting-place ; and rich men build their tombs beforehand and often visit them in the company of admiring friends. But they do not have things entirely their own way ; for

if a wealthy man who has led an irreligious life be buried close to a shrine, an angel will exchange his corpse for that of a poor and saintly man lying in some neglected grave outside the city walls!

Three days are set apart in each year for visiting the graves. On these occasions the well-to-do invite their friends to sit on carpets laid among the tombs and to listen to a *mulla* reciting the Koran while they partake of refreshments, the whole being quite a social function.

If a Persian has not omitted to perform his devotions, has fasted during Ramazan, and has given alms to the poor, he dies in a happy confidence of attaining to a Paradise replete with material enjoyments. Rivers of delicious water, of milk, and of honey, flow through lovely gardens, where beautiful youths hand round goblets of unfermented wine. A marvellous tree, laden with every conceivable fruit, thrusts its branches through the windows of the mansion apportioned to each Believer, offering him his favourite dishes, and even providing him at his desire with horses ready saddled and bridled. The Faithful, clad in silken garments, lie on couches and are tended by houris of surpassing beauty, who sing enchantingly and make them forget the women they have known on earth, the humblest believer being said to have no less than seventy-two of these fair ministrants.

All renew their youth and its desires in Paradise, but though faithful women may enter this abode of the Blessed, it seems plain that the Prophet did not contemplate that the marriages made on earth should be re-cemented in heaven. Indeed it appears that women are relegated to an inferior garden peopled with angelic



companions of the male sex. Therefore I think it may fairly be claimed that the Persian man from his birth, during the whole of his lifetime and in the next world, has a decided advantage over the Persian woman.

It is difficult to judge his character fairly, as the Oriental standard is not the same as the European ; but on the whole the typical upper and middle class Irani is a pleasant-mannered man with a flow of conversation, and because of his social qualities has been called the " Frenchman of the East."

He is keen, lively, and full of curiosity, vain of his looks and figure, and is careful in his dress, though forbidden to wear gold or silver, save the setting of his ring and the mounting of his sword-hilt. He loves visiting his friends, and is most hospitable, to lay food before a guest being, according to the proverb, one of the three occasions on which it is right to hurry. His literary and artistic tastes find an outlet in beautifully written copies of the poets, his carpets, the decoration of his *kalyans*, and sometimes in the laying-out of his garden. A Persian's speech is picturesque and interlarded with apt quotations from Saadi or Hafiz, and he is very proud of his native tongue, which Mohammed is said to have promised should be the language of Paradise. To an Englishman his conversation often sounds profane, so frequently is the name of God introduced. A Persian, for example, if asked to do anything, consents by the word *Inshallah* (Please God), encourages his horse with plentiful *Yallahs* (O God), offers anything with the remark *Bismillah* (In the name of God), and intersperses a narrative with many *Alhamdolillahs* (Thanks be to God) and *Mashallahs* (God is great). Besides this he swears

constantly by the Prophet, Ali, or Husein. He has a passion for discussing all subjects, religion being chief among them, but as a rule is profoundly ignorant of history and of the course of affairs in other countries. Yet he is critical and sceptical, the type of mind that has been productive of numberless heresies. The foreigner conversing with educated Persians will often be told that all religions are practically the same, the Bible, the Jewish Torab, and the Koran being in complete accord with one another. Fault, however, will be found with the New Testament, as lacking in *hukm*, or "command," a Mohammedan missing the copious set of rules to fit all cases which are to be found in the Koran, and which prevent all progress. Such Persians are apt to pose as freethinkers, and are fond of saying that they only visit the mosque and perform their devotions in order to impress their servants. They will have no objection to feeding with Europeans, though priests and strict Moslems do not care to smoke the water-pipe after a *Feringhi* has touched the mouthpiece with his lips; nor is an unbeliever admitted into the public baths, being considered unclean.

But many of these Persians who boast of having outgrown the tenets of Islam use their liberty as a cloak for excess, and are not ashamed of giving way to drunkenness, all Persians using the forbidden alcohol as a means of getting inebriated.

The women are far stricter than the men, and a Persian who had visited England complained that his own mother would not feed or drink from any article that her son had used, saying that he had become a *kafir* (unbeliever), from his contact with Europeans.

The mass of the people as a rule dislike the *kafir*, as they call the foreigner behind his back, though they dub him a *Feringhi* (Frank, or Frenchman) to his face; and should a Christian force his way into a mosque or a particularly holy shrine he would possibly be torn to pieces by the crowd. Indeed, so great is the intolerance that a Moslem who changes his religion is by law condemned to death, although the Persian is no proselytiser, in the twentieth century at all events. In a case that came under the writer's notice a Russian had had a dream in St. Petersburg, in which he saw himself converted to Islam at Meshed, to which city he was going on business. On his arrival he was admitted by the priesthood into the ranks of the Faithful, but as he knew no Persian or Arabic his knowledge of his new religion must have been cursory in the extreme. The populace wondered greatly at his conversion, because he gained no material advantage by the step; yet if at any future time he were to revert to Christianity he would immediately be liable to the death penalty.

This fanaticism crops out in many little ways, an educated Persian with Western ideas saying that when he visited the bazaars he was obliged to change his usual European costume, even to his stockings, if he did not wish to expose himself to disagreeable remarks.

Every traveller in Persia bears testimony that its inhabitants look upon artistic perversions of the truth as a fine art, any shame felt at being convicted of a misstatement would be because the speaker was conscious of having played his part badly, and because his statements, liberally garnished with oaths, had not carried the conviction intended. Yet there is one oath

which binds all Persians—that sworn on the Koran itself in the presence of a *mulla*, and deemed so sacred that it is only had recourse to on very serious occasions. The parties who are bound in this way, tremble with awe, and hardly ever perjure themselves; but the mere swearing by the Koran, not in the presence of a priest, means nothing at all, and it is significant that no oath is taken in a Persian court of law.

The word of an Englishman is always implicitly believed, and the writer was not unnaturally proud of the fact until she learnt from Mr. Malcolm's<sup>1</sup> book that Persians consider truth and honesty merely a matter of climate, and that, owing to the atmosphere of England her sons are constitutionally unable to lie!

Persians, in common with most Orientals, have not a particularly high standard of honesty, and indeed the custom of *mudakhil*, or commission, is not conducive to its cultivation. Every servant takes his percentage on all he purchases for his master, and all grooms, unless watched, will steal part of the barley, keeping the horses under their care on half rations: this is so customary that the delinquents are deeply injured if dismissed without a character. It sounds rather a paradox, but with these reservations, Persian servants are decidedly honest, and always take an interest in the credit of the household they serve, rising splendidly to the occasion when there is entertaining on hand. But certainly their ideas on this point differ from ours, and a Persian who visited England conceived an exalted idea of British honesty, based on the fact that in the London A.B.C. shops people actually paid their bills

<sup>1</sup> "Five Years in a Persian Town."

at the door instead of making a dash past the desk and into the street !

A nice trait in the Persian is his filial affection. A son will hardly dare to seat himself in his father's presence, and would never allow his parents to come to want ; he is also indulgent to his children, but in many cases looks upon his wife or wives as mere chattels.

Quick and clever as the Persian is, he is not fond of severe mental labour, and the saying, "Knowledge is a wild thing, and must be hunted before it can be tamed," is characteristic of the nation, few of whom exert themselves in the pursuit.

The European is often unpleasantly struck by the lack of gratitude among the Persians whom he meets. The servants, for example, will rush to him for medicine and attendance if ill, imploring help with an impassioned flow of rhetoric, but hardly deigning to mutter a reluctant *Iltefât-i-shumâ zidd*, the equivalent for "Thank you," when they have got what they want. Mr. Malcolm,<sup>1</sup> however, points out that the Persian considers that you do him a kindness in order to obtain a high position in Heaven for yourself, your *savab* or "work of mercy" being your gift to God to wipe out your sins, and, as it were, only one for the man you benefit and two for yourself !

The writer cannot altogether agree with this theory, because the Mohammedan Indians with whom she had to do were always most grateful for any small kindness shown to them ; and she is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that ingratitude is an integral part of the Persian character.

The Persian is not cruel as compared with other

<sup>1</sup> "Five Years in a Persian Town."

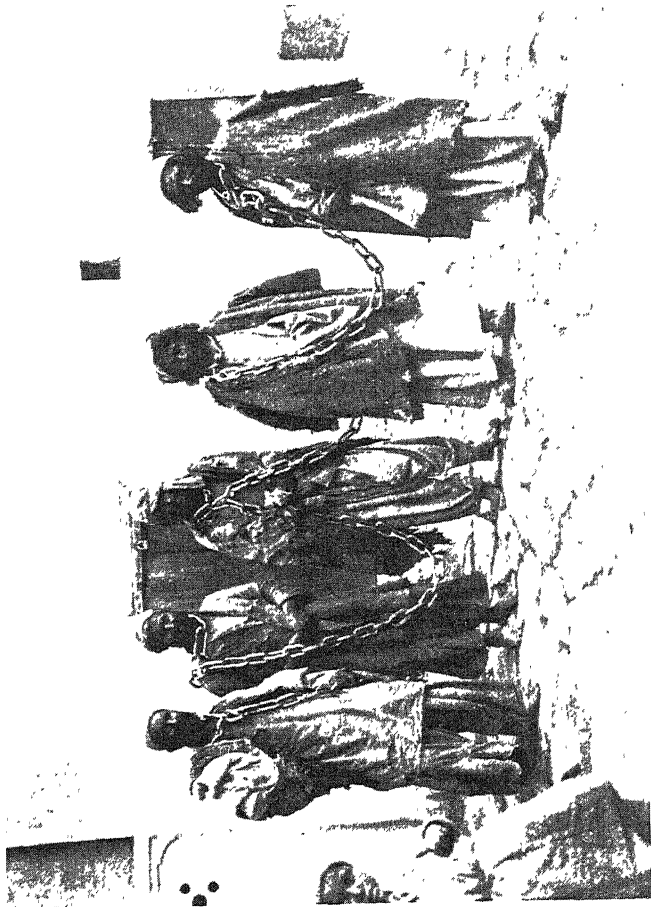
Oriental nations, though punishments for crime are often very severe, and every governor has his red-coated executioners in attendance. The usual punishment is the bastinado applied to the feet of the highest as well as of the lowest. Princes of the blood, viziers, and grandees are forced to "eat sticks" if they are unlucky enough to offend the Shah; irate masters inflict the *chub* on their servants, and it is ready in every school for the lazy pupil.

Cutting the throat is the common penalty for murder, and the corpse will be left for several hours exposed in the public square where the executions take place, to act as a solemn warning to the populace. Such horrible fates as being plastered up alive, being crucified, or blown from a cannon are practically punishments of the past; but a petty thief is still liable to have his hand severed, and thus be relegated to the miserable lot of a beggar.

If the Shah wishes to remove any prince or minister, poison will be resorted to, the Persians saying that so-and-so was obliged to drink "a cup of Kajar coffee."

A man arrested on suspicion of committing a crime will not have an easy lot, as he will often be tortured to force him to "confess," and he will probably be immured in a dungeon without air or light and swarming with vermin.

With regard to his treatment of animals the Persian errs more from laziness and want of thought than from actual cruelty. Mules and donkeys with sore backs are forced to work; pack animals usually fall in harness, worn out with incessant toil; and though a Persian is proud of his horse, and feeds it well, yet he rides it with



PRISONERS

a cruel bit, goads it with the sharp points of his shovel-stirrups and would never dream of dismounting to ease it if the going were bad.

The Prophet said on one occasion that every animal would appear at the Resurrection in order to give testimony for or against its owner ; but he neutralised this salutary warning with the command that no animal was to be killed save for food or for sport. This has led to conduct revoltingly cruel to English ideas ; for any worn-out animal, instead of being put out of its misery, is given "the freedom of the desert," which means that it is driven away from its home to die of starvation on the utterly barren Persian plains. In one case the decrepit pet-dog of a Persian of rank was carried some miles out of the town and left to perish, but to the astonishment of all the little creature found its way back to breathe its last at its callous owner's feet. Any traveller is certain to come across camels or mules lying beside the track *in extremis*, and his servants will greatly object if he is humane enough to give them their release, telling him that such an act will in all probability evict a *jinn*, or a departed spirit, that will wreak vengeance on those who have disturbed it.

It must be confessed that the typical Persian is not a patriot, though he has a great fondness for his native city, and as a rule much dislikes being exiled from it. The proverb "Every man loves his own country, even if it be hell," really means his own town ; this trait being partly owing to the corrupt form of government, that has looked upon Persia merely as a treasure-mine, to be exploited by any one in power, and also to the isolation of the different cities. All the principal towns are several days' journey from one another, long distances



apart which have to be traversed by riding. Therefore it comes to pass that the difficulty of communication cuts off the cities from the national life, and forces them to have their own organisation, and be self-centred, much as were the towns of Europe during the Middle Ages. Moreover, the inhabitants of every city are credited with special characteristics, the Isfahani being prudent, thrifty, and avaricious, as contrasted with the Shirazi, the Neapolitan of Persia, who is generous and quick-tempered, a lover of wine, poetry, and gaiety, and a passionate horseman. The inhabitants of Meshed are said to be boorish, those of Kashan cowardly, and so on.

It seems hard to dub the Kashanis cowards when that failing is shared by so many of the Shah's subjects—in fact the Persian proper is looked upon as the reverse of brave throughout Asia, and is a braggart to boot.

An English officer travelling in Iran once came across a great party of pilgrims at the mercy of one man, who was forcing his unlucky victims to disgorge their money by threatening them with a pistol. The Englishman covered the bandit with his revolver and made him drop his ill-gotten gains and his weapon, which latter was discovered to be not only unloaded but so out of repair that it could not have been fired off on any pretext! The pilgrims were anxious to wreak vengeance on their assailant as soon as he was defenceless; but this the officer did not permit, and allowed him to retreat to the hills, after which the caravan proceeded joyfully on its way, carrying the broken pistol as a safeguard!

Yet the descendants of the men who hurled back the

armies of Rome again and again in the time of the Parthian and Sasanian kings still exist, the Bakhtiari and other nomad tribes, being splendid fighters, and supplying the best troops in the Persian army. The country has not lost her fighting material, but she appears to have lost her leaders, the officers the writer had the privilege of meeting being singularly deficient in pluck and grit, and not at all ashamed of proclaiming the fact.

Morier's immortal "Haji Baba" depicts the Irani to the life—so much so that a Persian gentleman to whom the book was lent complained that it did not interest him, because it was just what he and his acquaintances did and said every day!

The Persian has his failings, certainly, but he is intensely human, and therefore very likeable, and there are few travellers who do not wish him and his country well in the crisis that both are undergoing. A nation that had a civilisation before those of Greece and Rome, and is still keenly intellectual, will, it is to be hoped, rise again, unless it is too heavily handicapped by a bad government, lack of communications, and the dead weight of Islam.

## CHAPTER V

### A PERSIAN CITY—MESHED THE HOLY

EVERY Persian city has some special feature that distinguishes it from other towns. There are, for example, the great square and mosque of Isfahan, the *ark*, or citadel, of Tabriz, the leaning *minar* of Kashan and the gold-domed shrine of Kum; but all these cities are more or less alike in their labyrinths of narrow alleys enclosed with high mud walls, opening out here and there into squares, and the bazaars are all built on a fairly uniform pattern.

As Meshed, capital of the province of Khorasan, and famous for its shrine, which is a centre of pilgrimage, is a typical Persian city, some account of it and its surroundings will give the reader a better idea of town life than pages of general description.

There are two ways of reaching the Holy City from England. One is to go by the Mediterranean and Black Seas to Batoum, thence by the Transcaucasian railway to Baku on the Caspian, crossing the inland sea to Krasnovodsk, where the railway is again taken to Askhabad, the Russian capital of Transcaspia.

The line passes by Geok Tepé, the scene of the great massacre of the Turkomans by Skobelev, and across a

barren steppe, intolerably hot in summer, to the garrison town of Askhabad. Here the traveller starts off on his hundred and sixty mile drive to Meshed, along a road cleverly engineered by the Russians across the mountain ranges, which separate Transcaspia from the Plateau of Persia.

This is not a metalled highway, and even in fine weather a four or five days' drive along it is not a particularly agreeable experience, as the rock, cropping out in places, and the boulders embedded at frequent intervals, cause the strongly built victorias to jolt horribly. A nervous traveller, moreover, will not appreciate the speed at which the drivers take their teams of four horses abreast round the sharp zigzags.

The Persians have laid the last part of the road from Kuchan, and in fine weather it is a rough and very dusty track across the vast plain that begins as soon as the Elburz mountains are crossed, and extends beyond Meshed. A government *concessionnaire* is supposed to keep up the whole route from the Russian frontier, but little or nothing is spent on repairs. Streams have often to be crossed in order to avoid broken bridges, and here and there long *détours* must be made, the road proper being too dangerously broken up to use. It can be understood that such a route is almost impassable in a spell of rain or snow, and many are the disasters that overtake the heavy *fourgeons* and their willing horses during bad weather.

Another and quicker way of reaching Meshed is the overland route by Vienna, Cracow, and Rostov to Baku, where the Caspian is crossed to Krasnovodsk. Here the Transcaspian railway can take the traveller

to Kakha, beyond Askhabad, from which station he can ride a hundred miles by rough bridle-paths, across the mountains, reaching Meshed from London in about thirteen days. The high passes are, however, blocked by snow during the winter, only being open at the end of April; and as there are no rest-houses and hardly any villages on the route, mules are necessary to carry the tents, baggage, and provisions.

Coming from Europe it is usual to approach the Holy City by the Askhabad road, along which pass the little victorias, the *diligences* and *fourgeons* of the West, jostling the East in the form of strings of solemn camels, jingling caravans of mules, donkeys laden with firewood or manure, and wild men on wiry, tireless horses, both riders and steeds looking as if they had come from the Middle Ages. The gleam of the golden-domed Shrine of Imam Reza can be seen far across the plain, but is lost sight of as the traveller drives through a suburb consisting of squalid mud-built hovels. Then comes a long stretch of the castellated mud wall of the city, which has towers at intervals, is surrounded by an empty moat, and is pierced by somewhat dilapidated gateways, their pinnacles adorned with glazed bricks. Here shabby-looking soldiers armed with obsolete muskets will be on guard, their dirty garments having hardly the semblance of uniforms, and their flat *kolahs* decorated with the badge of the "Lion and the Sun."

Originally Meshed was entered by six gateways, all of which are closed at sunset; but not long ago a seventh, a grandiose affair, was erected by the Russians, to give their bank outside the city walls direct communication with the town, and this step caused much

searching of heart among the Faithful, who looked upon it almost as a sacrilege.

In what may be called the "West End" of Meshed stands the *ark* citadel, where the Governor and his troops live, its gateway opening on to the *meidan*, where some obsolete cannon are ranged, and on one side of which stand the Customs buildings, officered by Belgians. A cobbled road leads past the square to the British Consulate, and between the *ark* and the city gate are houses and gardens occupied by the small English colony, and by the *khans*, or gentry of Meshed, the Russian Consulate being nearer the town. This quarter is well planted with trees, which give it a green look in spring and summer, and it may be called the *material* force of the Holy City, for here are the Governor in his citadel, ill-clad soldiers, and some dozen cannon. The magnificent group of buildings constituting the Mosque and the Shrine may be looked upon as the *spiritual* force of Meshed—the very heart and soul of the city.

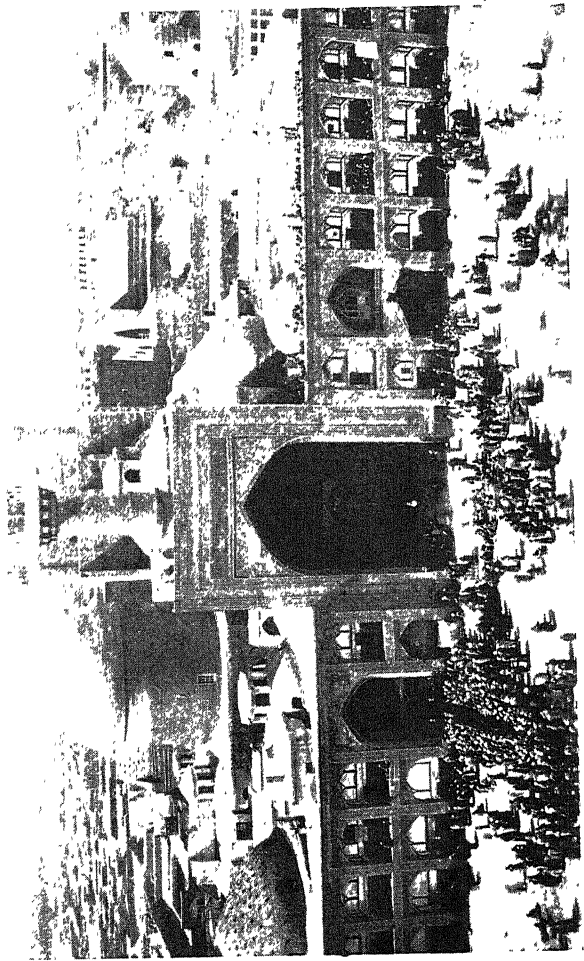
These holy places, alas, the Unbeliever is only allowed to see from a distance, as he rides round the city walls, or mounts some roof to get a glimpse of the golden dome of the Shrine with its attendant gold-topped *minars*, and the beautiful tilework on the great porticoes of the Mosque.

The sacred buildings are surrounded by a great enclosure, within which no unbeliever or animal may pass, and this region is called *bast*, or sanctuary. Evil-doers of all kinds used to be perfectly safe when once they had reached these precincts, and as most of the best shops are in the *bast*, refugees were wont to live at their ease and make good terms for themselves from

their retreat. It is, however, annoying to the traveller passing along the Khiaban, or principal street, to find his way stopped by an archway through which he may not venture, and in the bazaars by a great chain under which he may not pass.

But each day as he rides outside the city he will see the Mosque and the Shrine from some new aspect, yet nearly always backed by ranges of hills often purple and rose-tinted. At early dawn in the winter, the many-coloured tiles will faintly gleam through the semi-darkness, and a few hours later the golden dome will be shining with an almost unbelievable splendour under the rays of the Persian sun at noon, the metal with which it is covered never tarnishing in the dry climate. If the storm-clouds are gathering over the mountains, and the sky is black with threats of rain, the appearance of the dome will become almost sinister, turning to a copper-red against its angry background, and seeming to be all that is left of a city wreathed in mist and gloom.

Again, in the "after-glow" of sunset, which throws a glamour as of magic over the mud walls and squalid hovels of the city, the Shrine built in honour of the Imam Reza, and the Mosque, the work of a dead queen, stand up, airy and unsubstantial, throbbing with a soft rose-light like some wonderful vision revealed to the elect for a space, and then reft away for ever. But enough has been said to make the reader understand that this splendid mass of buildings is the great feature that dominates the landscape. It is impossible to be indifferent to them, and after awhile the eye turns to the majesty of their construction, to the fine blues and yellows of their tilework with a sense that they and



ENTRANCE TO THE SHRINE "IMAM REZA"



they alone are Meshed, and that all else is *maya*, or illusion.

In front of the Mosque is a piece of ground railed round with a stone balustrade, and the Persians tell how when Gohar Shad began to build her fine monument, a poor widow refused to sell this little Naboth's vineyard. The queen, in great contrast to the usual Oriental potentate, declined to press the matter, and to this day the small enclosure in the sacred precincts goes by the name of "The mosque of the poor woman."

Professor Vambéry<sup>1</sup> who, disguised as a dervish, visited the holy places, speaks of the Shrine as inlaid with gold, its walls hung with jewellery, weapons of great value, and carpets with precious stones woven into their texture, the tomb of Imam Reza being enclosed in a silver trellis-work which the hundreds of pilgrims kissed with fervour as they passed round it muttering prayers. Gorgeous as is the Shrine both inside and out, Vambéry infinitely preferred the Mosque from the standpoint of architectural beauty, and its magnificent tilework is hardly surpassed in Asia.

Fraser,<sup>2</sup> on his visit to Meshed some forty years earlier than Vambéry, was taken into the Shrine disguised as a Persian, but would have met a violent death had he been found out. As he was most anxious to make a sketch of the *Sahn* (the magnificent courtyard), and the adjoining Mosque, he actually pretended, later on, to be a convert to Islam, repeating the *kalma*, or confession of faith, before a body of witnesses, in order to gain his point. However, the fanaticism of the populace prevented him from enjoying the privileges purchased at such a price.

<sup>1</sup> "Early Adventures."

<sup>2</sup> "Journey into Khorasan."

Eastwick,<sup>1</sup> who in the 'sixties had a glimpse of the Imam Reza from an upper alcove of the great quadrangle of the Shrine, might have lost his life, as he relates that the whole of Meshed was in an uproar the next day, saying that the sacred body of the Imam had been defiled by the by no means near presence of the Englishman.

Not long ago a French lady-traveller, staying for a short time in the Holy City, purchased a Persian woman's dress, and the idea spread through the town that she intended to penetrate into the Shrine in this apparently secure disguise. A Persian gentleman told the writer that such an attempt meant almost certain death, for the visitor would be met by a group of *seyids* as she entered the sacred building, and one would constitute himself her guide, reciting to her the customary prayers in Arabic that she would be obliged to repeat after him, and telling her where to prostrate herself. As the *Feringhi* had no knowledge either of Persian or Arabic, nor of Oriental customs or genuflexions, she would have speedily betrayed herself to her conductor, and the crowd, rendered savage by fanaticism, would have torn her to pieces.

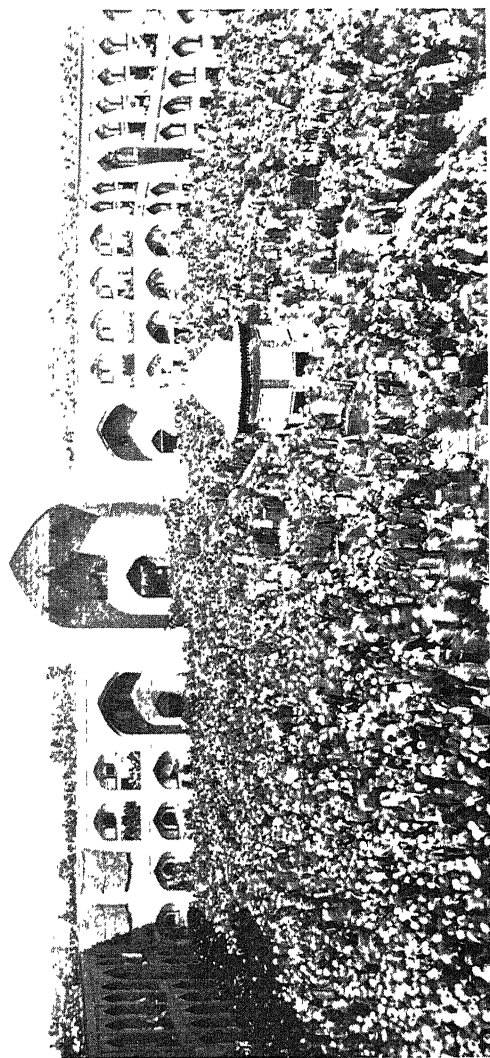
The pilgrims who visit the saint's last resting-place in thousands, obtain the title of *Meshedi* for their devotion, and the poorest will often spend the earnings of a lifetime in such an undertaking. Sunnis from Turkey, Afghanistan, Bokhara, and Samarkand worship here with the Persian Shiah, but must walk humbly in the stronghold of what they consider to be the unorthodox faith.

This great influx of pilgrims leads to a considerable

<sup>1</sup> "Three Years' Residence in Persia."

شrine of Imam Reza  
in the city of Mashhad

72



COURTYARD OF THE SHRINE 'IMAN REZA

trade in Meshed to supply their wants, and the travellers, following a Persian custom, are in the habit of taking to themselves *sighs*, or temporary wives, during their stay. This custom, sanctioned by the Church, for a *mulla* is called in to marry the couple for as many days, weeks, or months as may be desired, is common throughout the country, and is a potent factor in the degradation of the womanhood of Persia.

The city of Meshed (Place of Martyrdom) owes its very existence to the Imam Reza, in whose honour the Shrine was erected. According to Persian tradition this descendant of Ali who lived at Tus was taken into high favour by the Khalif Mamun, son of the illustrious Harun-al-Rashid, was given the Khalif's daughter in marriage, and was designated as his successor to the Khalifate. As happens so often in the East, an intrigue was started against the Imam, and Mamun's jealousy being aroused, he resolved on the death of his innocent son-in-law, and it is said offered poisoned grapes to him with his own hand. After the victim had partaken of the deadly fruit, feeling that he was doomed, he rose to leave, and on the Khalif inquiring where he was going, he answered, looking at him with reproach, "I am going to the place where you have sent me." At the present day pilgrims are shown, embedded in the wall of the Shrine, the plate on which is supposed to have lain the poisoned grapes; and as the devotees pass round the tomb of the saint, kissing the lock of the grating that encloses it, they call down fervent curses upon both Mamun and his father Harun, the latter being buried close to the Imam Reza.

Whether this legend be true or not, it is known

that the Eighth Imam died in the ninth century at Tus, the old capital of Khorasan, and was buried in the garden of Sanabad where the Khalif Harun was already interred. His tomb became a place of pilgrimage at once, and after the sack of Tus by Mongol hordes in the thirteenth century, those of the inhabitants who had escaped massacre betook themselves to the garden-shrine round which the present city of Meshed has grown up.

Early in the fifteenth century Shah Rukh gave rich gifts to the sanctuary, and completed the fine mosque that his queen had begun to build. But the Uzbegs from the north looted the city again and again, despoiling the Shrine of its treasures, and it was not till 1598 that Shah Abbas, whose rule in Persia is looked upon as a Golden Age, recaptured the city from these raiders. He then repaired the sanctuary, covered its dome with plates of copper overlaid with gold, and adorned its fine façade with splendid tile-work, in order to encourage his subjects to expend their enthusiasm and their money in Persia rather than in Arabia. Henceforth it became the Mecca of the Shiah world, and though of course the tomb of Ali at Nejef, and Husein's shrine at Kerbela had prior claims to sanctity, yet patriotic and pious Persians contented themselves with rendering honours to the Imam Reza.

In the troublous times after the extinction of the Sefavi dynasty, Meshed changed her rulers often, and again and again the Shrine was despoiled of its jewellery, china, rare manuscripts, and gold, until, in 1818, Fath Ali Shah gave the city some years of peace, and at last, in 1848, Nasr-ed-Din Shah subdued

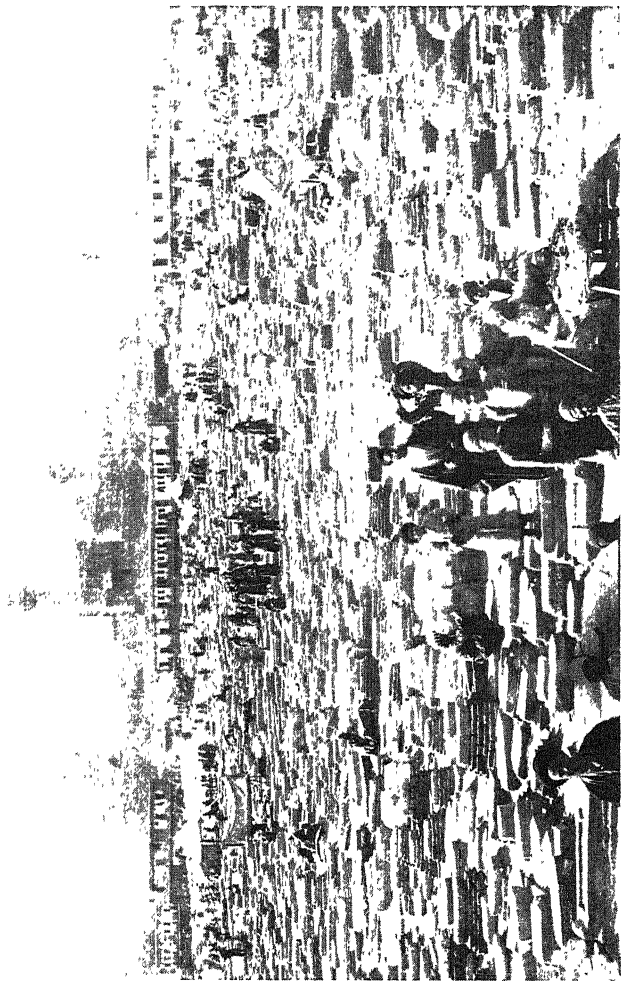
the almost independent province of Khorasan, and gave large offerings to the burial-place of the Eighth Imam.

The space round the Shrine is one vast graveyard, people paying from £10 to £100 for the privilege of interment within its precincts. And this season of rest is not of very long duration; for as soon as the inscription on the flat stone, which forms part of a great pavement is defaced by the myriad feet of pilgrims, a fresh corpse will be laid in the grave, and the stone re-cut for the new-comer. Indeed Meshed is almost as much a city of the dead as of the living, for every open space seems to be covered with flat tombstones. And when there is no more room inside the walls, the graves lie in thousands outside, riders and pedestrians taking short cuts across them; and these cemeteries are said to be haunted by huge rats of such ferocity that the grave-diggers are forced to wear long leather boots as a protection against them.

The custom of laying the dead to rest among the living, as it were, is in order that the passers-by may say, "God grant you peace and a dwelling in Paradise with the Prophet." Such crowded burial-grounds and the habit of disturbing them, would probably lead to epidemics in any other country; but the pure, dry air of Persia apparently acts as an antiseptic, the Meshed children looking healthy enough in spite of the absence of all hygienic precautions and a water-supply by no means above suspicion. Persians affirm that nothing can ever be wrong with running water, and do not object to the women washing their clothes at the spot where the water enters the city; and

they also say that the contents of a receptacle holding more than fifteen gallons of water cannot be impure, scoffing at the idea that the tanks used for ablutions in front of their shrines may possibly be disseminators of disease.

Next to the Shrine and Mosque, the Khiaban, or Avenue, made by Shah Abbas, is a distinctive feature of which all the inhabitants of Meshed are proud. This is the main street of the town, over a mile and a half in length, down the centre of which runs a narrow canal, said to contain the water that the poet Firdawsi's daughter gave to the city of Tus, and which was afterwards carried on to Meshed. Here men drink and perform their ablutions, and the women wash soiled garments in the stream, which is bordered by plane-trees and crossed at intervals by rickety-looking bridges. On either side of this promenade are booths and many a tea-shop. This latter institution answers in a way to the English public-house, so much so that in the winter of 1907 the women of Meshed went in a body to the Governor of the city begging him to close the *tchai-khanas*, on the plea that their husbands spent all their earnings there. Tea is the national drink of Persia, owing to centuries of intercourse with China, and the tea-shop is the club of the middle and lower class Persian, where he can talk to his friends or listen to the song of a caged *bulbul*. Here the public story-teller finds an audience, and sometimes the *lutis* will give a performance of music and dancing. For the traveller there is the interest of watching the passing along of many nationalities, the inhabitants of Meshed themselves being rougher in looks and manners than those



GRAVE-YARD ROUND THE SHRINE OF MESHEH



of other towns of Persia, and showing the admixture of Turanian blood in their broad faces, high cheek-bones, and in many cases their red hair and fresh colouring. From the Khiaban is an entrance to the covered-in alleys of the different bazaars, which are lit and ventilated by large holes placed at intervals in the brickwork of the vaulting. The *pushteen*-makers are working at the picturesque coats of sheep-skin which defy all weathers, the wool being worn next the person, and the skin embroidered with yellow silk in beautiful designs. Further on men are repairing old carpets so wonderfully that the darns are only visible when the back is examined, and there is a noisy quarter where the brass-wrokers are hammering and turning out *samovars*, graceful ewers with long spouts for rose-water and utensils for household use. Elsewhere the processes of bread and sweetmeat-making are being carried on in full view. Amid hideous patterned modern carpets, silk embroidery of the crudest colouring, masses of shoddy clothing and third-rate crockery are old bits of carved and painted work which could not be produced nowadays, or perhaps a scrap of a Turkoman saddle-bag looking like velvet from constant use, or an old damascened weapon, the gold still gleaming from its background of rusty steel.

The bazaars are a disappointment to the European who wants to pick up old carpets and good turquoises; and when his road is barred by a heavy chain it is annoying to be told that the best shops are all in the *bast*, where no unbeliever may visit them. However he cannot fail to be interested in the life surging round him. Swarthy, hook-nosed Afghans in white

garments and turbans; Bokhariotes in striped silk coats; Turkomans and Kurds in huge sheepskin caps; merchants in tightly folded embroidered turbans and brown *abbas* (clokes); *seyids* (descendants of the Prophet) with green or blue-black headgear and waist-cloths; all go about their respective business. Perhaps a holy *mujtehid* (high priest), with long beard and flowing robes, will pass along, seated on an ass, and the crowd will reverently make room for him as he goes on his way. The women, closely shrouded in their black *chadars*, look more like spectres than human beings, as they glide by, and impart an element of mystery to the haggling, gesticulating crowd.

Amid all the hurly-burly of buying and selling the European will be haunted by a familiar aroma of which perhaps he was first aware in the bazaars of Smyrna or of Constantinople, and which he will meet throughout Asia. There is in it a hint of spices, of attar of roses, of burning wood, and of fried meat; in summer the fruit-stalls play their part, mixed with an odour of humanity and animals, not to speak of open drains. But whatever its component parts may be, when the traveller who has "heard the East a'calling" sniffs it, he knows that he is back once more in the land that has captured and held part of his soul, and for which he has hungered half-unconsciously amid the settled life and comfort of the West.

Like most Persian towns, Meshed gives an impression of being coloured in different shades of *khaki*, the word meaning the colour of earth or dust (Persian *khak*), and has little of the "gorgeous East" about it, apart from the Mosque and Shrine. The high walls, broken

by wooden doors leading to the jealously hidden dwellings, are made from the same mud as the roads, and only better-class buildings are plastered. Though the townsfolk may be clad in black or blue with black lambs'-wool hats, yet the prevailing dust gives them a dingy appearance; and in winter the felt and sacking clothing of the peasants is of the same tone as the soil on which they work. Grey donkeys stagger along the cobbled lanes laden with sun-dried mud-bricks or great piles of dun-coloured camel-thorn, and in and out slip the dust-coloured, mangy pariah-dogs. These scavengers of the town make night a pandemonium with their barking, and are, with reason, looked upon as unclean animals by all good Mohammedans. Here and there is a row of stalls with a very meagre stock-in-trade of groceries; or a baker's shop with the long, damp, thin, brownish cakes of bread stuck on nails; or a fruit-stall, a mass of colour. Despite the narrow alleys (one cannot call them streets except by courtesy), sheep will be tethered in front of the shops, or rather booths: a fighting ram with great black, curled horns is fastened at a corner; and a couple of camels may be seen lying on the ground, completely blocking the way, and meditatively chewing a meal of chaff laid in front of them.

The dervishes are usually to be found where the people congregate most. They are striking-looking figures in white garments of dubious cleanliness, with leopard skins flung over their shoulders on which flow their long, unkempt locks from under a conical felt cap, often embroidered with texts. Sometimes they carry a begging-bowl, beautifully carved, and they go from place to place telling fortunes, giving charms and love-potions, and

professing to cure sickness with their *nuffus*, or sacred breath. This they accomplish by blowing three times on the afflicted part, and reciting the *Fatiha*. Although there are learned dervishes, and poets among their ranks, yet many are lazy, impudent beggars addicted to opium, who demand alms from all they meet, and get free board and lodging and the best seats everywhere as a right, the pious saying that "God provides their kitchen." They are much to the fore during the month of Muharram, forming processions in which they strike and cut themselves as a sort of advertisement of their holiness; and at the No Ruz, or New Year, they pitch tiny tents at the doors of persons of rank, and make ridiculous little gardens of pebbles and twigs in the dust of the road just as children would do. They then keep up an incessant braying with cow-horns, yelling at intervals *Ya Hak! Ya Hu!* ("Oh Truth! Oh He!"—meaning God), this zeal obtaining for them a handsome present from the owner of the mansion.

And roaming about the streets of Meshed may be seen an old *seyid* who constitutes himself censor of public morals. If he meets a man with unshaven head and shaven beard, he beats him with the small stick that he carries. This he will also apply to the back of any man whom he sees strolling along munching a cake of bread—the reason of this being that no one should eat before performing his ablutions, and that the food should be laid on a cloth. Moreover, he reproves any woman who dares to uncover her face in the streets. The inhabitants of Meshed look upon this somewhat eccentric character as a saint, and those who are ill call him in to pray over them, believing that marvellous recoveries have been effected by his prayers.

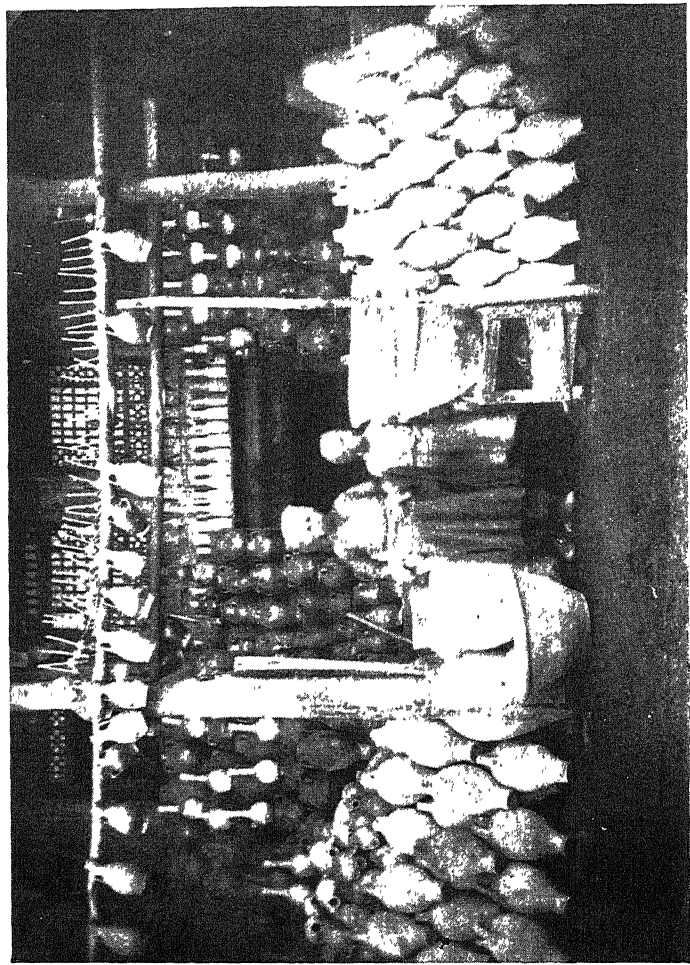
In the poorer parts of Meshed the courtyards of the houses are all below the level of the street, a custom which makes the dwellings very damp if the winter be a wet one; and heavy rain is a real calamity, as many of the flat mud roofs are certain to fall in. When there is snow every one shovels the mass from his roof into the street—a simple method rendering the narrow lanes almost impassable until the thaw comes. The cobbled streets have no names, and the houses no numbers; but the whole city is divided into wards, and every one is supposed to be in his house by ten o'clock at latest.

As there are no workhouses in Persia, the beggars have to shift as best they can, and it is a pathetic sight to see them huddled up on the wooden counters of shops, covered with a piece of sacking during the cold of a winter's night when the thermometer may register 5° to 11° Fahrenheit. It is not surprising that many die from the exposure, in spite of the comforting Persian saying that God gives much cold to the well-clad, but little to those who lack clothing.

The traveller riding round the city walls is struck by the very primitive manner in which they are roughly patched, the inhabitants having been terrified by a recent Turkoman raid into repairing their defences. Just outside the gates he will notice great heaps of manure that are left for some time in the open before being used on the land, Persians sitting among them when they "eat the air," and apparently callous to their odours. Unsightly brick-kilns, with huge, untidy stacks of yellow bricks, are a blot on the landscape; near by are hundreds of broad, earthenware hoops used in *kanat*-making, scores of *kuzehs*, or pitchers, stand-

ing beside the public highway waiting to be baked, also piles of stones to be burnt for lime are dumped down at haphazard. Here and there flows a small stream, and the busy washerwomen spread garments of many colours to dry on the *kanat* mounds; or the water is being used by the dyers, and runs crimson or indigo as the case may be. By the public shambles a crowd of fierce pariah dogs come bounding out, barking savagely, and at this point a flock of sheep is standing, and brisk bargaining going on between the shepherds and the butchers, or great heaps of wool are being examined by would-be purchasers. Not far from here long strands of scarlet and blue worsted used in carpet-making are being strained against the city wall, and further on is the tanners' quarter with hundreds of skins hung out to dry. Stately Khorasan camels hold their heads high as they stalk solemnly past, laden with great bales of cotton and wool, or perhaps with oil and hardware from Russian territory. Sometimes the leader of a string of these animals may carry a huge plume of brown wool which stands erect on the back of the pack-saddle, and looks much like the nodding feather ornaments of a hearse, giving the caravan a curious appearance when seen from a distance.

Everywhere there is dirt and squalor, and to the European eye nearly everything is badly in need of repair; the so-called road is a track broken in places; the so-called bridges over the streams are often unsafe for horses to negotiate, and repellent-looking beggars seem to appear at every few yards. The reader may say that the glamour of the East is conspicuous by its absence. But if he saw the scene under a heaven of deep turquoise blue and lit up by



POTTER'S STALL AT MESHEH

a sun that gilds and beautifies the meanest details, transforming a mud-built village into a picturesque fortress ; and if he drank in an air perhaps unsurpassed for its purity and invigorating qualities, he would be in the mood to look for beauties and not for defects, and would fall a victim to the mysterious spell of the "Land of the Lion and the Sun."



## CHAPTER VI

### THE ENVIRONS OF A PERSIAN CITY—MESHED

THE Holy City of Meshed lies at the broadest part of the valley of the Kashaf Rud, long ranges of mountains, peak rising behind peak, bounding the wide plain on either side. Tracks, worn by the feet of countless caravans that have passed through the centuries, cross and recross what is one of the most fertile districts of Persia, and in the spring the wide stretches of land under cultivation are green with crops of wheat, barley, millet, lucerne, beans, and opium. The greater part of the ground is irrigated, and water is carried from the hills by means of *kanats*, the shafts used in the boring of these subterranean watercourses being dotted all over the plain. In the course of years, the mouths of these great circles of earth fall in, and assume alarming dimensions, one close to the city being capable of engulfing a carriage and pair with ease as it lies beside the rough track frequented by all who drive.

Some five miles to the north of the town the river runs, much encumbered with mud shoals, that in some places are white with salt-efflorescence and in others are hidden by great masses of rushes, the haunt of wild duck and teal. It is a sluggish stream of no great width as it winds across the plain, its name appropriately



JAGHERK VALLEY

signifying a tortoise. In the hills are rushing torrents with charming villages on their banks which are a beautiful sight in spring-time when the cherry, peach, apple, pear, nectarine, and apricot-trees are in full bloom.

The most picturesquely situated of these is Jagherk, its name having the ominous meaning of "Place of Drowning." It is some twenty miles distant from Meshed, and as the stream foams and swirls among the boulders, big poplar groves dispute with the fruit-trees for every foot of ground on its banks, and lush herbage strewn with flowers grows to the very edge of the water, reminding one of the Austrian Tyrol, and the resemblance is borne out by the frowning peaks that enclose this Happy Valley. The villagers in bright blue cotton coats with white shirts, turbans, and *cammerbands*, are a pleasing contrast to the dingily attired townsfolk, and sometimes a dandy will appear in a costume of royal purple, or another will wear a mauve shirt with embroidered collar and indulge in a coat of an artistic raw-sienna shade of cloth. Many of the children are as rosy as those in England, yet it is said that the inhabitants of Jagherk and the other villages in the narrow valley suffer much from fever and eye-complaints. Indeed, to live where the houses are huddled so closely together that it is possible to walk over nearly the whole village on the roofs, where the few lanes are ankle deep in dirt, and where drainage is practically non-existent, cannot be healthy; but it is unfair to malign the beautiful climate when the illnesses are owing to man's mismanagement.

Such of the English as are able spend the hot months in this valley, and the children come back to

the town bronzed and vigorous as from a trip to an English seaside.

To return to the immediate environs of Meshed, the most striking object about a mile from the city is Kuh-i-Sangi, a curious double hill, from the top of which can be obtained a fine view of the Mosque and Shrine, and under which is a much-frequented tea-house and little sanctuary. The track leading to these is the promenade of Meshed, and carriages and riders go up and down it on Fridays and holidays, the horsemen careering madly about and often racing one another. Legend says that Ali told the Persians to quarry for stone in these twin-hills. His advice, however, has not been acted upon, for the quarries proper are in the hills behind, and are merely narrow passages in the flanks of the mountains, the stone being all cut out by hand, without the aid of blasting, and carried into Meshed on the backs of the patient donkeys. Stone is therefore expensive, and in consequence nearly all the buildings are made of sun-dried bricks that crumble away with the passing of the years.

Not far from Kuh-i-Sangi is a stretch of desert used by the English for polo and golf, the "greens" of the latter game being composed of grey sand slightly different in colour to the prevailing dun of the plain. Persians do not appreciate the "egg game," as they designate it; but the polo played by the English and the escort of Indian *sowars* is one of the sights of the city.

Major Sykes,<sup>1</sup> who reintroduced the old national game of Persia both at Tehran and Meshed, believes that *gu-i-chogan*, as the Persians call polo, was played

<sup>1</sup> "Ten Thousand Miles in Persia."

in Iran from prehistoric times, probably being in vogue before 700 B.C. He points out that although the earliest reference to the game is in the Pahlavi history of Ardeshir, yet Firdawsi in his "Book of the Kings" gives a vivid account of a match in which a legendary hero, who lived before the dawn of history, was the chief player.

Under the Sasanian dynasty, so popular was the game that, according to the poet Nizami, ladies played it. He gives a highly picturesque account of a match which Khosru Parvis and his wife, the beautiful Shirin, attended, the Shah being so charmed with the exhibition that he insisted on joining in and knocking about the ball with these "fairy-faced ones."

In Mohammedan times Sir Anthony Sherley, when at the Court of Shah Abbas, early in the seventeenth century, and Chardin somewhat later, both witnessed and wrote descriptions of the game; but after the Sefavean dynasty, Persia became such a prey to anarchy and invasion that polo died out, and unfortunately there seems no likelihood that it will ever be revived by the Persians themselves.

Across the plain of Meshed at frequent intervals are mud-built towers that were used some forty years ago to protect the shepherds from the raids of the Tekke Turkomans. These terrible "men-stealers," as they were called, were accustomed to ride a hundred miles a day on their tireless steeds, their object being to take the luckless, and, it must be confessed, cowardly Persians as prisoners, and sell them for slaves in the markets of Khiva and Bokhara. Vambéry<sup>1</sup> gives a vivid account of the utter panic into which a large caravan of pilgrims

<sup>1</sup> "Life and Adventures."

escorted by soldiers armed with rifles, would fall, did they see a few horsemen galloping towards them. The weapons would be thrown down and every one, soldiers included, would tamely submit to be herded into captivity without striking a blow to avoid what they knew was a miserable fate, their captors treating them with a brutality which passes description. On one occasion Vambéry met a Turkoman who on foot and alone had actually made prisoners of three Persian men, driving them before him for eight miles into slavery! If kept by these nomads to herd their flocks, the captives would be half-clothed and half-starved, and at night would be tethered to a stout wooden staple by a chain which they were forced to drag about with them all day. M. de Blocqueville, a French photographer in the employ of Nasr-er-Din Shah, was captured by these barbarians, who routed the Imperial troops, and he was kept in slavery for a year and a half before the Shah paid the exorbitant ransom demanded for him.

Travellers such as Ferrier, Fraser, and Eastwick show how the Turkomans terrorised the whole of Khorasan, and Persia owes a debt of gratitude to the Russians who, under Skobeleff, rid the northern provinces of these raiders; although the General's wholesale massacre of the tribe when he took their great fortress of Geok Tepé sounds like an echo from the times of the Mongol invasion rather than modern warfare. Even at the present day the Turkoman spirit is not entirely quenched, and in the December of 1907 the Kurdish troops had an encounter with them not far from Meshed, the soldiers returning in triumph and bearing thirty Turkoman heads on poles which were paraded through the city.

The British Government has utilised the energies of some of these nomads by forming them into a postal service to carry the mails between Meshed and India, officials of the Amir of Afghanistan taking the letters over at Herat and being responsible for their safe convoy to India. One of these *sowars*, Reza by name, is really a Persian, having been stolen in childhood by the Turkomans and living with them until he was grown up, when an uncle, employed by the British as a muleteer during a Boundary Commission, recognised his long-lost nephew. Reza then became a postal *sowar*, and usually meets at Askhabad any English travellers to Meshed, being able to turn his hand to anything—an invaluable quality when “on the road”; and, moreover, is of such a cheerful, garrulous, friendly disposition, that he is a prime favourite, in spite of his brigand-like exterior.

Just outside Meshed there rises in lonely grandeur one of the few monuments remaining to testify to the munificence of the Sefavean dynasty. This is the Musalla, or Place of Prayer—a lofty brick portico once faced with beautiful tiles, the pattern of which is identical with those on one of the entrances to the Mosque. Now, in common with most old Persian buildings, it has fallen into a ruinous condition, though it is used occasionally as a place of intercession when storm, famine, pestilence, or war are dreaded, the people making a pilgrimage to it at such times.

Here also on the Festival of Gadir a camel is killed, a needy Persian prince collecting alms to purchase the animal, which is adorned with gay trappings, and its

flesh is distributed amongst the populace when the sacrifice is consummated.

The design of the Musalla shows the striking difference between Gothic and Oriental architecture. A Gothic cathedral is beautiful viewed on all sides; but as a rule, a mosque, however fine may be the grouping of its dome and *minars*, must be surveyed from a special standpoint. The great portico of the Musalla is impressive when seen from the front, but is an ugly mass of brickwork at the back and sides. The method, moreover, of covering large parts of a building with tilework is hardly satisfactory, however beautiful it looks when perfect, because if the tiles drop out in places an immediate effect of neglect and decay is given.

The only monument near Meshed in fairly good repair is the shrine of Kwajah Rabi, some five miles to the north of the town and charmingly situated in a garden planted with trees. On the gateway is an inscription declaring that the sanctuary was erected by Shah Abbas in 1621, the sovereign calling himself the "King of the Kings of the World," "the Sovereign of Mankind," and so on, but with a touch of humility adding that he is after all a mere "Dog of the Porch of Ali."

Below all this verbiage is a modern inscription invoking a curse on the man who does the least injury to the shrine or to the trees surrounding it; but this has not been much of a deterrent, for many of the finest planes in the avenue leading to the sacred building have been felled, and the dome and portico themselves have been stripped of their best tiles. Everything is allowed to go to ruin; the brickwork has many a gaping crack and the handsome blue, purple, yellow, and



black glazed bricks which adorn the porticoes, together with the tiles, are sadly in need of repair.

Inside, fortunately, all is much as it was when Shah Abbas prayed here. A broad turquoise band of tilework, on which are verses from the Koran in white lettering, runs beneath the spring of the stencilled dome, and at a height of some four feet from the ground, round the entire building, is some of the most beautiful tilework in Persia. These *kashi* are grounded alternately in purple and turquoise-blue, relieved with white designs, outlined with a brown so lustrous that it gives the gleam and impression of gold.

Under the lofty dome, in a large, red, wooden box, rest the remains of the saintly Kwajah Rabi, the companion of Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet, and on the wall of the sanctuary runs an inscription saying that the Imam Reza made the pilgrimage to Meshed, solely to pray at this tomb. Little did the Imam then think that above his own grave there would rise a shrine the most magnificent and renowned of all Persia, and that Kwajah Rabi's blue dome would be left to fall into decay and be only visited at rare intervals. One reason for this is that the Sunnis claim the saint as theirs, and send their dead to be buried round his resting-place. But as Kwajah Rabi was a personal friend of Ali, and lived in the days before Shiah and Sunni came into being, it seems a little hard that he should owe his unpopularity to this cause.

The environs of Meshed do not offer much to the sportsman, but some of the English are in the habit of shooting snipe and teal in the marshes, or duck by the river during the winter. On such occasions it is

necessary to rise in the chilly darkness that precedes the dawn, as the best shooting ground lies some twelve miles from the town. If snow has fallen recently, the cobbled, narrow lanes of Meshed will be scattered with hummocks of frozen snow, making it advisable to dismount and stumble over them on foot, rather than on horseback. At this early hour hardly any one is to be seen, and the few poor people afoot have muffled up their heads in many wraps, though in all probability their feet are only protected by cotton shoes; and the Khiaban, the Piccadilly of Meshed, is almost deserted. Some twenty minutes' walk, the last part of the way being through the squalid dwellings of the poorest quarter of the city, brings the party to a gate sadly in need of repair, and here every one mounts. Though the roads are slippery, and ice-covered pools must be carefully avoided, yet the sun is rising higher into the heavens every moment, warming the world and melting the frozen slush. Once free of the graveyards and the broken ground round the city, the horses begin to canter along the tracks still covered in places with snow, and at last reach a dry watercourse with high cliffs rising on either side of what was once the bed of a broad stream. (The Persian word for river, *rudkhana*, means the "house" or bed of the stream, from the fact that the water itself is so often conspicuous by its absence). Crossing this *nullah* and ascending and descending slippery slopes of mud, a long valley or rather frozen swamp is reached, intersected by a stream from which branches many small rivulets. On either side are low, reddish-coloured hills, and it is wet walking, for every one now dismounts, the sportsmen plunging into the rough reeds and sedges covered with

thin ice that breaks promptly and lets them into the water below. A wisp of snipe (*nuk-i-diraz*, long beaks, as the Persians call them) fly up and are stalked, and some duck and teal fall to the guns. One of the grooms, a most intelligent and active beater, implores the Sahibs to shoot a couple of beautiful green-legged bittern, that he says will be excellent eating for himself and the escort, and whenever a bird is dropped he rushes forward with his knife to cut its throat, muttering the formula that makes it *hallâl*, or fit for food. A fox-terrier, quite as keen and almost as intelligent as Shahbaz, leaps into the water after any lost bird, often putting up others as he hunts in and out the reed-beds.

After four or five hours' tramp, during which the sun has become quite hot, though the exhilarating air wards off any fatigue, the long valley has been beaten from end to end, and the party mount and ride a couple of miles to the spot where lunch and a change of boots and stockings are waiting for them. The food eaten in the open tastes excellent, the roads are now almost free of frost, and it is possible to canter the whole way back to the city to the luxuries of hot baths and tea.

This same valley about the middle of March will resound with the songs of birds, flocks of larks will soar jubilantly into the sky, and the ground will be sprinkled with almost stalkless mauve crocuses while the tiny scarlet tulips should be about to burst into bloom. Lizards, black spiders, ants of an abnormal size will be busy with their several avocations; herds of sheep and goats will crop the herbage encrusted with salt in place of ice, and cattle

will plough the red loam on the crests of the low hills.

Some sixteen miles from Meshed, on the banks of the Kashaf Rud lies Tus, the parent city of the present capital of Khorasan, and where the Imam Reza breathed his last. It is a charming ride on a spring day along the well-worn tracks "made by Allah," as Persians put it, and across the fertile plain, green with springing crops, where the oxen engaged in ploughing give a touch of life to the wide expanse bounded on all sides by mountain ranges. Huge mounds, all that is left of Khaka, the oldest city of the valley, are passed; and some four miles away stands the ruined shrine of Tus, the fragments of its citadel and its broken-down walls being distinctly seen in the radiant clearness of the atmosphere. The mediæval capital of the province is approached by a "camel-backed" bridge, sadly out of repair, and the traveller is astonished to find that a circumference of little over four miles of mud-built wall encloses the ruins of a city once famous throughout Asia for its poets, astronomers, and philosophers, among whom dwelt Firdawsi, the great epic poet of Persia. Chinghiz Khan and his savage Mongol hordes sacked the city in the thirteenth century and decimated its inhabitants, who gradually took refuge in Meshed round the tomb of the Imam Reza. There is little enough of Tus to-day to recall its departed glories. The shrine, built of fine brickwork and adorned with charming stucco, is a picturesque ruin, and there is no indication in whose honour it was erected, the inscription on its plaster-work,

"The world lasts but for an hour," being singularly appropriate.

Fraser,<sup>1</sup> who visited Tus in 1821, speaks of the interior of this shrine as being perfect. However, at the time of the writer's visit in 1908 its walls were partly broken through, though it still made a fine concert-hall for a young Persian with a high falsetto voice. He was singing beautifully in the Oriental mode with many a shake and trill which echoed and re-echoed through the ruin. Listening to him stood a group of handsome youths in turbans and flowing cloaks, holding the bridles of their spirited horses, adorned with the gayest of trappings; and behind them, through a ruined arch, could be seen snow-capped peaks standing up against a turquoise heaven, the whole forming a picture that would have delighted an artist.

The remains of the *minar*, fifteen or twenty feet of which was standing in Fraser's day, have now totally disappeared, the fine brickwork having probably been taken for building purposes; the ruins of the old citadel built on an artificial mound, and consisting of an inner and outer stronghold, both surrounded by moats, have shared the same fate, the peasantry carrying off the crumbling sun-dried bricks to be used as manure for the crops.

Fraser speaks of a dome ornamented with tilework and standing near the gateway, having been pointed out to him as the tomb of Firdawsi. This building, however, is not to be seen at the present day; but close to the little village that nestles in a corner of the old city wall, is a mound of *débris* littered with scraps of tile that the peasants say is the grave of the

<sup>1</sup> "A Journey into Khorasan."

great epic poet. It appears that some forty years ago a literary governor of Khorasan wished to erect a fitting monument over the last resting-place of the "Homer of Persia," but the site of his grave could not be found. At this crisis a *seyid* had an opportune dream, and on awaking he declared that the spot shown to-day by the peasantry had been revealed to him in this vision, and on it the governor accordingly commenced a dome, which he never completed, and which is now a mere mass of rubble. Certainly Persians care little, as a rule, for the last resting-places of their illustrious dead; but in this case they are not to blame, because the old chronicle relates that the great poet was buried in a garden belonging to him, outside the city walls.

And as the traveller returns to Meshed, leaving behind him only unsightly ruins with never a trail of ivy or a creeper to hide their nakedness, and beautify them as in Europe, he reflects that the road along which he canters is much as it was in the Middle Ages. On either side the same crops, the same primitive method of ploughing, the same species of marmot, that scuttles into its burrow with a sharp squeak at the approach of the horses. And around him the same mountain ranges coloured in many shades of purple, amber, and sienna, the high peaks behind them covered with snow until April showers her own snow in the form of blossom on the myriad fruit-trees of the valley.

The famous turquoise mines of Nishapur can hardly be considered to belong to the "environs" of Meshed. As, however, that city is the headquarters of the only gem to be found in the country, and as the *firuz* (the name meaning victory) is looked upon as a power-

ful amulet, being worn by every one who can afford it, some account of the mines may be of interest.

They are about three days' journey from Meshed, and are supposed to have been worked from Achæmenian times. Major Sykes, who visited them in 1908, says that they are difficult of access, no ladders being used, and the visitor being obliged to hoist himself up and down the shafts by sheer force of arm. No machinery whatever is employed, the miners chipping off the hard stone with chisels. In the rock itself are found the best kind, the *sangi* (stony), which, when deep blue and flawless, will fetch very high prices. The other kind, the *khaki* (earth) stones, are found by washing the soil, and are usually pale and specked with white. Connoisseurs are able to tell at a glance from which special mine a stone has been dug. The turquoises are found in groups between the layers of matrix, and the matrix itself is often cut and polished if the blue in it predominates over the black. Tiny "seed" turquoises are discovered in great numbers, and are used for ornamenting pipe-heads, amulet boxes, and even harness, being of such small value that a hundred can be purchased for sixpence. In buying turquoises it is as well to call in the assistance of an expert, for the sellers are in the habit of keeping the stones moist, in order to deepen their colour. Pale and worthless stones are often ornamented with gold devices, and are stuck on the ends of short sticks for sale, looking attractive when new, but soon acquiring a greenish tint. The workers in the mines are searched when their daily task is over, but it is said that many of the best turquoises are concealed and sold by the miners; and indeed the temptation must be

great, when a moderate-sized stone will easily fetch £30 to £40 if of a deep sky-blue and without a flaw. These stones acquired their European name from the fact that they were first introduced into the West by way of Turkey.

Riding in the neighbourhood of Meshed it is not unusual to meet a gruesome caravan of mules laden with corpses which have been sent from different parts of Persia to be buried near the shrine of the Imam Reza. The coffins, fastened up in sackcloth, are in the charge of the muleteer, who has been given the burial-money to hand over to the authorities of the Shrine. It is said that these *charvadars*, usually marvelously honest, are occasionally tempted by the large sums given them beforehand, to drop the bodies into some ravine on the road and there leave them to their fate. And indeed this is hardly to be wondered at, for the odour of a "caravan of the dead" during the hot weather is terrible.

This is how Professor Vambéry<sup>1</sup> describes a midnight encounter with such a caravan:—

"It consisted of about forty animals, horses and mules. The backs of the animals were laden with coffins, and we made every effort to avoid the dread procession. In passing near one of the horsemen who had charge of the caravan, I caught sight of a face which was frightful to look at. The eyes and nose were concealed by some wraps, and the rest of his lividly pale face looked ghastly by the light of the moon. . . . At some distance from the caravan of the dead, I glanced back at the strange funeral procession. The animals with their sad burden of coffins hung their

<sup>1</sup> "Life and Adventures."



heads, seemingly trying to bury their nostrils in their breasts, whilst the horsemen, keeping at a good distance from them, were urging them on with loud cries to greater speed. It was a spectacle which, seen anywhere, could not fail to produce a profound impression of terror, but seen in the very centre of the desert at the dead hour of the night, in the ghastly illumination of the moon, it could not fail to strike the most intrepid soul with awe and terror."

## CHAPTER VII

### A POPULAR ACCOUNT OF THE RELIGIONS OF PERSIA

PERSIA is a Mohammedan country, but it must not be forgotten that Zoroastrianism, commonly known as Fire Worship because its followers took the sun and fire as symbols of the Deity, was the religion of the land until the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, consequent on the Arab invasion in A.D. 641. Its followers still survive in some thousands, though they have undergone every kind of persecution since the Moslems conquered them.

At that period and later many Zoroastrians migrated to India, where they were called Parsis (*i.e.*, inhabitants of Persia). Here they prospered exceedingly, and are now doing something to help their co-religionists in Iran. At the present day the Zoroastrians, called *Gabrs* or infidels, are chiefly to be found at Tehran, Yezd, and Kerman, but all over the country they are in request as gardeners. This is probably because of their belief that tilling the soil is a good action.

Zoroaster, the founder of the old national religion of Persia, was a great religious teacher, in the same rank as Buddha, Confucius, and Socrates. Professor Williams Jackson,<sup>1</sup> the latest authority on this subject, believes

<sup>1</sup> "Zoroaster," by Professor Williams Jackson.

that he was probably born near Lake Urumiah in the province of Azerbaijan, about B.C. 660.

He belonged to the tribe of the Magi, who were supposed to be the depositories of learning in those days, and it is said that he retired from the world for some years of religious preparation before he entered upon his ministry at the age of thirty, having then received the first of seven revelations from Ormuzd, the Principle of Good, whose symbol was fire. His creed is that man must fight throughout his life against Ahriman, the Principle of Evil; but that he will be helped in his struggle by Ormuzd, and if he prevails he will attain eternal life at the Resurrection. It is the exact opposite to the creed of renunciation and quietism, with the absorption into Nirvana preached by the Buddha; there is no trace of asceticism in it; and it has a clarion note of struggle and reform that ends in victory. Yet, while to-day Buddha has millions of followers, those of Zoroaster are not a hundred thousand all told, and his religion practically never spread beyond the confines of the Persian Empire.

When the Median Prophet began to preach his mission, he only gained a single convert after ten long years of effort, during which he was encouraged to continue by visions from heaven. Then success came far above his expectations, for Vishtaspa, King of Bactria (the King Gushtasp of the *Shahnama*), was converted, and the new religion spread rapidly, penetrating into Turan, or Tartary, as well as throughout the Persian Empire. Zoroaster preached his doctrines indefatigably. He founded fire temples wherever he went, installed *mobeds*, or priests, to tend them, and instructed them in the elaborate ritual that he had

instituted. But the King of Tartary, the hereditary enemy of Persia, would not suffer the old idol-worship to be destroyed without striking a blow in its favour. He and his Tartar hordes invaded Bactria, stormed Balkh its capital, and killed Zoroaster who was officiating in the fire temple. This contemporary of Thales and Solon, and the forerunner of Confucius and Buddha, is supposed to have died at the age of seventy-seven, and his death gave an impetus rather than a check to his doctrines. The gallant Isfundiar, son of King Gushtasp, was filled with the zeal of a Crusader for the new religion, and defeated the King of Tartary, after which Zoroastrianism became the national faith, and flourished greatly until the conquests of Alexander, and later on the rule of idol-worshipping Parthian sovereigns dealt it heavy blows. In A.D. 226 King Ardeshir, who founded the Sasanian dynasty, made Zoroastrianism again the State religion of the land. He collected the scattered fragments of the Zend Avesta (the Parsi scriptures) and the Gathas or Psalms, the oldest part of the Avesta, written by the Prophet himself and containing his teachings. The complete copies of the sacred works, written on tanned ox-hides, had been burnt or dispersed when Alexander had set fire to the palace at Persepolis where they were kept. Priests, however, were found who had handed on the worship from one to another during centuries of neglect and persecution, and the teaching of the Median Prophet was again supreme in Iran until the Mohammedan conquest in A.D. 641 practically exterminated it.

Zoroaster declared that the ancient gods were only devils, but that Ormuzd was to be worshipped

alone. Good thoughts, good words, and good actions were the goal of every believer, who wore a three-fold cord round his waist to signify this, unfastening and refastening it three times daily at the hours of prayer.

Earth, fire, and water were not to be polluted, as they were the work of the Deity, and fire in particular was to be revered, no *Gabr*, for example, ever smoking. The Zoroastrians of Yezd at the present day claim that the flame which burns on the altar of their temple, has never been extinguished since it was lit in the lifetime of Zoroaster. Their priests always approach it with a cloth over their mouths lest their breath should pollute it, and wherever a new fire temple may be erected, its altar is lit from that of Yezd. To make the sacred flame it was necessary to bring to the same hearth sixteen different fires. Some of these were used in various trades, and one came from the burning of a dead body.

The Zoroastrians hold the dog in high esteem as being sacred to Ormuzd, and it is a crime to kill or injure one of these animals that are supposed to have the power of driving away evil spirits. The "four-eyed" dog of the Avesta is still common in the north of Persia, and was so named from having a yellow patch above each eye: it was white with yellow ears and yellow markings on its body. This animal is called in to decide whether a *Gabr* be dead or not, the belief being that if the dog eats a piece of bread laid on the breast of the corpse, its action proves that life is extinct.

The dead man is laid out by men appointed to the office, Zoroastrians so greatly dreading the defilement

that ensues from touching a corpse that the dying are often left untended in their last moments. The body is then carried to a *Dakmeh*, or "Tower of Silence," where it is exposed to be devoured by the vultures and crows, as it would pollute the earth if laid in the ground. Zoroastrians hold that if the birds pluck out the right eye first the soul of the departed has been safely guided over the Bridge of Chinvad to the realms of Ormuzd, to live for ever in the Paradise of the Blessed. If, however, the vultures decide to remove the left eye, the survivors fear that the soul has been hurled from that narrow bridge of inquiry, down to the gloomy kingdom of Ahriman, where are only bad thoughts, deeds, and words.

Close to the Tower of Silence is usually a mud-built house in which the relatives of a dead man prepare a meal, affirming that the soul, just after its separation from the body, is always greatly in need of nourishment, as it is believed to wander for three days near its earthly tenement.

The Zoroastrians, who chiefly survive at Yezd and Kerman, are a fine, manly-looking race in spite of the petty persecution of centuries. The Persians make them wear a peculiar dress, do not allow them to ride in the towns, force them to dismount if they meet any Persian of rank outside the city wall, and do not permit them to carry umbrellas, among other irritating restrictions.

As polygamy and divorce are forbidden by their religion, the women have a much better position than their Moslem sisters, and it is rare for them to marry the followers of the Prophet. The poorer women look picturesque in gay chintz jackets, full trousers em-

broidered in many-coloured stripes, and half a dozen wraps for the head, the fifth being a graceful white veil flowing down the back, and the last a big cotton sheet with which they envelop themselves when out of doors. The little girls wear a small coif from which the hair falls in long plaits, but the women would consider it immodest to show their heads without their numerous coverings.

The ordinary people have the vaguest ideas about their religion. The writer's Parsi maid, for example, used to extinguish candles with her fingers in order not to pollute the flame with her breath, and was horrified at hearing that her mistress had visited the Tower of Silence, explaining that she herself would be hopelessly defiled did her garment but brush against its wall. She always refused to wash anything on a Tuesday, saying that it would never be cleansed; and she attached a white shell to any possession she feared to lose, affirming that it was an infallible charm. She was devoted to her employer and of a transparent honesty; but the Persians say that all *Gabrs* are honest, because they lack the courage to steal! Would that the Irani were afflicted with a like timidity!

The Nestorian Church comes next in point of antiquity in Persia, the followers of its founder establishing themselves in Iran soon after the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.), at which the doctrines of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, were condemned, and he himself excommunicated and banished.

It is, however, believed that Christianity had many adherents early in the fourth century, and that its followers joined the Nestorian Church. This body

flourished exceedingly in the sixth century, had bishoprics throughout Persia, and was so filled with proselytising zeal that it sent missionaries into China and India, with the result that Marco Polo, travelling in the thirteenth century, found Christians throughout Asia.

Early in the fifteenth century Tamerlane almost extirpated the remnant of Christians which had survived the Arab conquest and the Mongol invasions, so that at the present day there are only some twenty-five thousand Nestorians, who are principally to be found in the district of Urumiah where their Patriarch resides.

There are altogether about ninety thousand Christians in Persia (Nestorians, Armenians, Greek, Orthodox, Protestants, and Roman Catholics) and some thirty-six thousand Jews, who are looked down upon and persecuted, and who supply the ranks of the despised class of *lutis* or public dancers, singers, and entertainers. They are expected to undertake dirty work of every kind, and by no means uphold their European reputation for financial ability, being invariably worsted in trade by the Armenians, of whom Persians say, "If you can deal with an Armenian, you can deal with the devil himself."

Three centuries ago Shah Abbas transported some thousands of Armenians *en masse* from Julfa on the Araxes, to a suburb of Isfahan (which he named after their native city) in order to teach their handicrafts to the Persians. Since then, in spite of persecution, they have never given up their religion. As they have intermarried among themselves they have kept their original type, their women in scarlet dress with a white cloth



thrown over the head and concealing their mouth and chin being a pleasant contrast to their black-shrouded Persian sisters.

The authorities are tolerant to all faiths since the residence of Europeans in Persia; but the populace is now and again stirred to fury by the *mullas* against the *kafirs*, or unbelievers—and, indeed, the Armenians are not favourites in Iran owing to their business capacity and their reputation of being grasping and avaricious.

And now we come to Islam, the national religion of Persia, which her children were forced to embrace when conquered in 641 A.D. during the Khalifate of Omar.

The Persians, partly from hatred of their conqueror and partly because Ali's son, Husein, is said to have married the daughter of their last Sasanian monarch, joined the Shiahs (Followers of Ali) when Islam was split up into the two great sects of Shiah and Sunni, and at the present day Omar is burnt in effigy throughout the kingdom with an accompaniment of fireworks and popular execrations. This matter, however, is treated more fully in the chapter on Muharram.

Mohammed, the Prophet of Arabia, elevated his countrymen greatly by the religion he founded, his doctrine that there is but one God delivering them from a degrading idol-worship that permitted the murder of their infant daughters and other horrible practices. As he found both polygamy and slavery among the Arabs he can hardly be blamed for not reforming these customs; but he still further degraded the position of women, although many writers assert the exact contrary to be the case. In the words of Sir

William Muir,<sup>1</sup> a wife "was possessed of more freedom and exercised a greater, a healthier, and more legitimate influence under the pre-existing institutions of Arabia than under the sway of Islam"; and again, "As regards female slaves under the thralldom of Mahometan masters, it is difficult to conceive more signal degradation of the human species."

Mohammed claimed to be the successor of Moses and of Christ and to be greater than either; and his followers believe that the Koran was delivered to him in detachments by the angel Gabriel and that there is not a single word in it which is not of Divine origin. The sacred character of this book is so strongly impressed upon Moslems that they would look upon it as blasphemy to think that any part of it could be the work of a man; no one would dare to touch the revered volume before performing his ablutions, and the most shiftily believer would regard an oath taken upon it as binding.

The Prophet called his religion Islam, which means "Resignation to the Will of God." He taught that those falling in battle in its defence would go straight to one of the seven heavens prepared for Moslems, whatever may have been their past lives; but that any apostate would be consigned to the seventh hell, lower than that peopled by Jews and Christians. This belief rendered the warlike Arabs perfectly fearless in battle, and accounted for their marvellous early conquests. With it was bound up the doctrine of Predestination, impressing on a man that his fate is marked out for him and that, strive as he may, he cannot alter it.

Mohammed also taught that prayer wafted the believer half-way to heaven, fasting assisted him to

<sup>1</sup> "Life of Mahomet."

the gate of Paradise, and almsgiving took him within the sacred precincts.

Perhaps it is not possible for a European to criticise an Oriental religion fairly, yet to the writer, on whom at first Islam made a favourable impression, it seems to have led its followers into a kind of stagnant moral backwater where progress appears to be impossible. The belief in *kismet* (destiny) encourages a dreary fatalism, its exponents shrugging their shoulders at whatever goes wrong without making any effort to right it, and prayer has sunk into a mere formula, an "empty repetition." Dean Stanley says that "it is reduced to a mechanical act as distinct from a mental act, beyond any ritual observances in the West. . . . It resembles the worship of machines rather than of reasonable beings."

Travellers in the East have often commented on the way in which a Moslem will spread his prayer-carpet and perform his devotions unabashed in the sight of the world and have held this up as a worthy example to European reticence. Certainly there is something fine in this open profession of faith; and yet when the stranger observes how a Persian will constantly interrupt his devotions for a few words with a friend, and will glance at anything passing by, he may not be so greatly impressed; indeed, the habit of praying in public must militate against concentration of thought.

As an example of this is a quotation from Mr. Eastwick's<sup>1</sup> account of a visit he paid to the Imam Juma, or high priest, of Meshed, a man revered by the fanatical populace for his sanctity and for being a *seyid*, or descendant of the Prophet. The holy man was at his

<sup>1</sup> "Three Years' Residence in Persia."

devotions, but notwithstanding sent a servant to bid his visitor enter. The Imam Juma was kneeling on his prayer-carpet, on which were some books and a comb for his beard. "'Talk,' he said; 'do not mind me.' I said I would rather not talk while prayers were going on. He said, 'Oh, I thought your heart would be dull; that's why I told you to talk.' I said, 'Excuse me, I shall not be dull. I would rather not talk till you have done praying.' So he went on praying, bowing and prostrating himself, also coughing and spitting and combing his beard and occasionally saying, 'How d'ye do?' to persons who came into the room. This lasted for more than half an hour. . . ."

Fraser<sup>1</sup> in his travels notes much the same thing. "However men may be occupied when the set hour for prayer arrives," he writes, "those who choose to observe it merely turn aside from the rest, still laughing, perhaps, at the last ribald jest, and commence their invocation to God. During the intervals they continue the conversation, scold or give orders to their servants, comb their beards or adjust their persons, frequently interrupting their expressions of praise or of devotion to give vent to the most trifling or perhaps the most obscene remarks."

The rosary, or *tashih*, is used by all Mohammedans for counting the ninety-nine attributes of Allah; for reciting various acts of devotion; and for purposes of divination. It consists of a hundred beads, and is supposed to have been borrowed from the Buddhists, there being no record that the Prophet and his earliest followers used it: in all probability the Crusaders introduced it into the Christian Church.

<sup>1</sup> "Journey in Khorasan."

Fasting is practised from sunrise to sunset during the whole month of Ramazan, no food or water passing the lips nor *kalian* being smoked, and it is believed that those who die during that time are secure of paradise. This enforced abstinence presses lightly on the rich, who sleep all day and feast and pay visits to one another all night ; but the poor are obliged to work until midday, and if Ramazan happens to fall during the heat of summer, the want of water is a cruel deprivation. As the Mohammedan year is a lunar one, Ramazan will fall annually about eleven days earlier than it did in the preceding year.

Mothers with young children, girls and boys under ten and twelve, and really delicate men and women are granted a dispensation from the fast ; and many Persians are in the habit of going on a journey during the month in order to secure immunity. With these exceptions all Moslems must submit to this month of abstinence or be looked upon as unbelievers and risk excommunication by the priests, and ostracism, if not worse, from their neighbours.

In the town cannon fired at dawn and sunset announce the commencement and end of the day's fast ; and during Ramazan most of the shops in the bazaars are shut, and business is more or less at a standstill. The pious often "meet" Ramazan, as they say, by commencing to fast some days earlier than is necessary. Sir W. Muir<sup>1</sup> points out that it was winter when the Prophet first instituted this fast, and that in all probability he intended it to be kept at the same season ; for though the Arabian year was lunar, yet the Arabs corrected it by a system of intercalating one

<sup>1</sup> "Life of Mahomet."

month into every three years. This system Mohammed overthrew later, and it is a wonderful testimony to the power of Islam that its followers all over the globe should still keep Ramazan as strictly as in the early days of the Faith, whatever may be the sufferings they undergo from thirst.

Almsgiving is, as we have seen, highly commended, and the Prophet is said to have deprived himself of everything, save the necessities of life for himself and his wives, to give to the poor. There are of course plenty of charitable Moslems; but it often seemed to the writer as if Persian almsgiving were a form of "laying up merit," a guarantee against risks both here and in the world to come. For example, every one going on a journey gives money to the beggars in order to ensure the prosperity of the undertaking; yet no effort is made to reclaim these miserable creatures, nor is money spent on hospitals, orphanages, or education for the destitute. It is a greater *savab* (act of merit) to give to a drunken *seyid* than to the most deserving beggar.

Before the end of the world the Mahdi, the last of the Twelve Imams, is to appear, and inaugurate a millennium, and this doctrine has been fruitful of much trouble, as it has encouraged the rise of countless False Prophets throughout Islam, who have attracted followers to their standards by their claims to be the long-expected Saviour.

The angel Israfil blows the last trumpet at the Mohammedan Day of Judgment, which is supposed to last over half a century, and which will be preceded by the coming of Antichrist, who will be slain later by Jesus. Persians, however, affirm that their beloved Ali will rout the false Christ and the horned devils

attending him, with the aid of his famous two-bladed sword Zulfakar. At this time all the dead return to their bodies, the eyes of men and women moving to the tops of their heads in order that they may not see one another, but only Allah and the heavenly hosts. The angels, who have kept an account of their deeds on earth, then weigh them in balances, and if the evil outweighs the good the man or woman is cast into hell; but if the reverse, he or she is given the choice of a material paradise or of returning again to earth.

On this occasion all the animals will rise up and bear witness as to how their owners have treated them, after which they are annihilated; and the wicked, who are reserved for eternal torments, will beseech Allah of His mercy to turn them into dust likewise; but their prayer will be offered in vain.

The whole social structure is based on the religious law, and the Persian priesthood, as a rule, uses its influence against progress and the spread of education. Any man who can read and interpret the Koran can act as a *mulla*. If he is able to expound the *shar*, or religious law, the people will flock to him for judgment and give him the title of *mujtehid*, or chief priest, his decisions, if he has a high reputation, being regarded as final.

The Government does not usually appoint these ecclesiastical dignitaries, but often gives the guardianship of an important shrine, such as that of Meshed, to a Court official as a reward. Nadir Shah seized the endowments of the clergy to pay his soldiers, thus dealing a blow at their power from which they have never recovered. The *mullas* conduct the services in the mosques, teach and recite the Koran, preach, visit the sick and

write letters, and in the villages their fees are paid in kind.

The numerous holidays that help to keep Persia a poor country are all, with the exception of No Ruz, associated with their religion, chief among them being the Eed-i-Kurban, or Feast of Sacrifice, which the Prophet instituted in imitation of the great Jewish Day of Atonement. Mohammedans say that it commemorates Abraham's sacrifice of Ishmael, erroneously imagining that he, and not Isaac, was about to be offered up by his father. At this festival the head of each family takes a cow, sheep, goat, or camel, and turning the head of the creature towards Mecca, he repeats over it a religious formula and then slays it, dividing its flesh among his family, his relatives, and the poor.

There is also the Eed of Ramazan, the end of the long month of fasting, and this is naturally a season of rejoicing for all, at which time it is incumbent on the Faithful to give money to the poor.

Salutes of cannon, brass bands playing out of tune, and official receptions take place in all Persian cities on the festival of the Haj, when the pilgrims who have arrived at Mecca receive the coveted title of *Haji*.

The way by land to the centre of the Moslem faith is long and arduous; and it may happen that a Persian caravan of pilgrims fails to arrive in time to present the offerings of sheep at the great holocaust at the Kaaba, in which case all their toil, time, and money will have been expended in vain. Although there is much real piety connected with this pilgrimage, yet it is said that some go to Mecca in order to use the



sobriquet of *Haji* as a business speculation. People imagine that a man must be wealthy to undertake such an expensive expedition, and therefore, sometimes to their cost, lend him money readily.

These are only a few of the Persian festivals that seem legion to the European, who is frequently inconvenienced by the constant closing of the bazaars and work of all kinds coming to a standstill.

The entire life of a Moslem is ordered by a religion that encloses him in a network of observances—a religion that takes away his individual responsibility and that has become for most of its adherents a barren form. And what are the fruits of Islam? It destroyed idol-worship with much gross superstition, and taught the pure doctrine of one infinitely perfect God to whom all must surrender their wills. But on the other hand the Koran degrades family life, in fact makes it almost impossible, by its encouragement of polygamy, divorce, and slavery; and it also forbids any religious freedom, death being the penalty for apostasy. Islam is, in fact, a set of rules, which proceed from a God with whom man can never come into contact, but whose Prophets proclaim His will. No Moslem consequently must ever criticise the Prophet, and must accept every word in the Koran as divine, thus yielding up all personal responsibility; and a Persian will see no great harm in dishonesty and immorality, as long as he performs his religious observances.

Such a creed bars the way to progress and liberty, and its adherents cannot attain to a true civilisation, for its cast-iron framework admits of no expansion.

Here a word must be said as to the missionary work

done in Persia. The American missionaries have practically taken over the north of the kingdom, the English sphere of influence being from Julfa, the suburb of Isfahan, southwards, with centres in Yezd and Kerman, and there are also Roman Catholic missions. Tourists say that the missionaries confine their efforts to reclaiming the often degraded Nestorians and Armenians, and that their converts from Islam are conspicuous by their rarity. As the penalty by law for apostasy from that creed is death, it would be surprising if conversions were numerous; but the writer believes that the missionaries by living among the people, by giving them medical aid, and by holding up a high standard of life and morals, have an influence for good that cannot be estimated. The mere fact that men and women are devoting their lives to helping others who are not of their own race or religion, works powerfully on many minds, and a rough muleteer spoke of one lady missionary, known throughout Persia for her medical skill, in the following words: "Allah in His mercy has sent an angel to Iran in that He allowed the 'Khanum Mariam' (Lady Mary) to dwell in the land and heal us and speak good words to us."

A Persian acquaintance who was educated by the missionaries never lost an opportunity of affirming that he was a convinced Mohammedan and had only attended the school in order to imbibe Western learning.

Yet those years of training had left an ineffaceable mark on his character. He had grasped in a way unusual with his countrymen the meaning of truth and patriotism; he hated the intolerance of the priesthood and was an ardent Nationalist, looking to the Majlis

to inaugurate the Millennium for Persia and sweep beggary out of existence. Though he maintained that the British Constitution, which he regarded with an ignorant admiration, was based on the Koran, yet he ruefully complained that there were many "dark passages" in that sacred book, and that his female relatives looked upon him almost as an unbeliever for having hinted this to them. In fact, owing to missionary influence, he had climbed to a higher level than those around him, and it is to him and to his fellows that Persia must look for regeneration.

The Persians made a long and stout resistance to their Arab conquerors, and even when they yielded to the fierce armies of Islam and gave up the doctrines of Zoroaster for the Koran, they never received the Prophet's teachings in the simple, unquestioning way in which the uncivilised Arabs had done. Almost from the first they employed their subtle intellects in debating this point or that until heresies and false prophets without number arose.

Among the latter Al Mukanna, immortalised by Moore in "Lalla Rookh" as "The Veiled Prophet of Khorasan," is probably the only one whose name will be familiar to the ordinary reader.

This man, who is said to have been a fuller at Merv, gave out, about A.D. 780, that he was an Incarnation of the Deity. Thousands of credulous Persians flocked to his standard, and the armies of the Khalif fought against him in vain for the space of fourteen years, after which they besieged and took the fortress wherein he and his followers were holding out. Their victory was an empty one, however, for they found nothing but dead

bodies as they burst through the gates, the adherents of the False Prophet having taken poison, and he himself having died on a funeral pyre in order that the people might believe that he had left them but for a season, and would reappear as he had foretold. Every legend about Al Mukanna speaks of the mask, or veil, which he habitually wore to conceal a countenance of surpassing ugliness; but the reason he himself gave was that he covered his face in order not to dazzle his disciples with its effulgence.

There is also the tradition that he caused a "false moon" to rise from a certain well, which was visited night after night by crowds of people anxious to see this remarkable phenomenon. It gained for him hundreds of converts, and the "Moon of Al Mukanna" is mentioned in two Persian poems, such an impression did the Veiled Prophet and his dramatic death make on his own and succeeding generations.

Sufism and Babism are the two heresies about which Europeans in Persia hear most.

The Sufis, or Mystics, are those who do not take the words of Mohammed literally, but give them a so-called spiritual interpretation; and they came into prominence in the time of Ismail Shah, the founder of the Sefavean dynasty. Sufism is more a philosophy than a religion, and several of the most celebrated poets of Iran, such as Hafiz, are supposed to be singing of divine mysteries in their songs of love and wine. Though there are seekers after truth in their ranks, yet many writers affirm that the Sufis use their mystical creed as a veil for excess.

Professor E. G. Browne,<sup>1</sup> however, speaks of them as

<sup>1</sup> "A Year among the Persians."

akin to the Quietists and Quakers, and says: "It is indeed the eternal cry of the human soul for rest; the insatiable longing of a being wherein infinite ideals are fettered and cramped by a miserable actuality. It is in essence an enunciation more or less clear, more or less eloquent of the aspiration of the soul to cease altogether from self and to be at one with God."

The sect of the Babis is so remarkable that many hoped that it might vivify the dry bones of Islam.

From the works of Lord Curzon<sup>1</sup> and Professor E. G. Browne,<sup>2</sup> the latter of whom has made a special study of this subject, we learn that the founder of Babism, Mirza Ali Mohammed, a native of Shiraz, was given to religious meditation and went on pilgrimages from an early age. At the age of twenty-four he proclaimed himself to be the Bab, or "Gate," by which his followers might attain salvation; and throughout Persia he was hailed as the Mahdi, the long-expected Twelfth Imam.

His doctrines spread so rapidly that the Government and priesthood became alarmed, and imprisoned him at Shiraz. From that city he escaped to Isfahan, where the governor protected him; but on the death of his patron he was again consigned to a captivity which only ended with his death. On his way to the fortress where he was to be immured, village after village on the route poured forth its inhabitants to greet him with the wildest enthusiasm; his adherents rose at Yezd and in the province of Mazanderan; and the inhabitants of Zanzan defended their town against a Persian army with marvellous bravery. The beautiful poetess Kurratu 'l-'Ayn spread his doctrines far and

<sup>1</sup> "Persia."

"A Year among the Persians," etc.

wide, until her tragic death at Tehran; and it seemed as if the status of women would be raised, for they were to be considered equal with men, were to throw off their veils, and polygamy and divorce were to be abolished.

The Bab, however, was shot at Tabriz in 1850. Strangely enough, he actually escaped unhurt after the soldiers had fired at him, the bullets having merely cut the cords that bound him; and the cloud of smoke concealed his flight. His hiding-place was soon discovered, and he was dragged forth and done to death. His adherents were suppressed with terrible cruelty, and their attempt to assassinate the Shah resulted in sanguinary massacres in which, almost without exception, they met death and torture with unflinching heroism.

If the Bab had escaped, in all probability Persia would have been converted to his doctrines *en bloc*, and would have emerged from the petrifying influence of Islam into a liberal atmosphere where progress was possible.

At his death his followers split up into two factions, one following Mirza Yahya, whom the Bab had designated as his successor, and the other Beha Ullah the half-brother of the new Gate. Beha soon asserted his claim to be "He whom God shall manifest," and gave out that his revelations were superior to those in the *Bayan*, or Bible, composed by the Bab during his imprisonment; and at the present day his successor is regarded as the head of the Babi faith, and his adherents visit him in his retirement at Acre.

Almost up to now the Babis have been persecuted at intervals, the last popular outburst against them,

engineered as usual by the priesthood, occurring at Yezd in 1903, when many were slain.

It is difficult to know whether the movement is gaining ground or not, as its followers naturally keep their faith a secret; but the standard it sets up is so high that it is to be hoped that in time it may become a power in the land.

Many look upon the latest development of Babism, Behaism as it is called from its founder, as one of the great religions of the world, and they affirm that it numbers its adherents by millions.

Beha Ullah asserted that he was the last Manifestation of the Deity, and, as such, included in his own person the teachings and powers of Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Christ, and Mohammed. There is no ceremonial or priesthood in his religion, which inculcates love toward all men, equality of the sexes, a universal language, and peace throughout the world.

Beha Ullah himself died in 1892, but his son carries on his work, and at the present day European and Oriental men of every nation and belief meet at Acre to sit at the feet of Abbas Effendi, the Master, as they call him, and imbibe his teachings.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MUHARRAM

THE month of Muharram (meaning sacred) is to the Mohammedan world what Lent is to the Christian—a time of mourning, self-sacrifice, and acts of special devotion.

No one who has lived in a Moslem city during this period can fail to have been impressed with the religious fervour shown, and will never forget the dirge-like lament “Hasan! Husein!” and the accompanying dull thud, as the mourners beat their breasts in sign of impassioned grief.

In a Shiah country such as Persia, Muharram is a great factor in the religious life of the people, and the play commemorating the tragic deaths of Husein and his family is able now, after the lapse of over a thousand years, to rouse the Persians to a frenzy of woe. There are many scenes of this great Persian drama, and the only thing to which it may be compared is the “Passion Play” as acted by the peasants of Ober-Ammergau. In each case the play is a religious tragedy, the onlookers feeling that they are present at a sacred spectacle, and being deeply moved when the objects of their adoration are presented to them in bodily form.

But before we give any account of the ceremonies of



Muharram, the story of the martyrdom of Mohammed's descendants must be told.

According to the Shiah, Ali ought to have succeeded the Prophet as the first Imam, and the festival of Gadir commemorates a dubious tradition that Mohammed, when he deserted Mecca for Medina, stopped at the village of Gadir Khom, and mounting on a platform of camel-saddles declared to thirty thousand of his adherents that he nominated Ali as his successor. Sir William Muir<sup>1</sup> however, points out that the man who presided at public prayer was always considered to hold the chief authority; and when Mohammed was too ill to perform this task himself, he delegated it to Abu Bekr (father of his beloved wife Ayesha), who was chosen to be the first Khalif.

It is not improbable that Ali may have considered that he had a right to the succession in virtue of his marriage with Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, and the latter never recognised Abu Bekr as Khalif and endeavoured to stir up her friends against his rule.

The Persians have a tradition that on the Prophet's death Fatima urged her husband to demand the Khalifate, and that throughout a whole morning she returned again and again to the charge, but was met with total silence. At last, when it was noon and the call to prayer rose from the *minar*, Ali opened his mouth and inquired, "What is that man saying?"

"There is but one God, and Mohammed is His Prophet," Fatima answered, somewhat surprised.

"Do you wish that call to be heard throughout the world?" her husband continued; and on hearing his wife's assent, he said, "If I become Khalif it will

<sup>1</sup> "Life of Mahomet."

cease, but if Abu Bekr be elected it will endure ;” and from that moment Fatima ceased to urge Ali, who perhaps knew his own limitations.

Abu Bekr was succeeded by Omar, the conqueror of Persia, and at his death the Khalifate was offered to Ali. But when the latter announced that he would be guided by the Koran and his own judgment, paying no attention to the “tradition of the elders,” Othman was chosen in his stead ; and it was not until the assassination of this latter that the “Lion of God,” as he was called from his personal courage, became Khalif in A.D. 655. But he succeeded to a most uneasy throne, and having more valour than brains, he refused to listen to all advice. Ayesha supported his deadliest enemy Moawiyeh, Governor of Syria, in the latter’s pretensions to the Khalifate, even accompanying his troops at the famous Battle of the Camel, which was the beginning of civil war among the Faithful. Ali was victorious on this occasion, but was worsted in the next encounter ; and while he was gathering troops for fresh efforts he was assassinated in the mosque of Kufa by one of his old adherents. Two others of the band attempted to murder Moawiyeh and Amrou at the same time, believing that Islam would be at peace if the Khalif and his bitterest enemies could be removed ; but their enterprise ended in failure.

Hasan, Ali’s elder son, was now elected to the Khalifate, but was of different fibre to his father, for he meekly abdicated in favour of Moawiyeh, only stipulating that he should resume his position on the death of the latter. This plan, however, the Khalif frustrated by instigating Hasan’s wife to poison her

husband, and Yezid succeeded to the throne of his father Moawiyeh at Damascus.

But there was yet another son of Ali, the gallant Husein, and he and his descendants are peculiarly dear to Persians, because he is believed to have married the daughter of the last king of Persia and thus carried on the royal Sasanian line.

Husein was living quietly at Mecca when he was urged by the inhabitants of Kufa to place himself at their head, and lead a revolt against the usurping Khalif Yezid. He acceded to their request, and set off with his family for Kufa; but Yezid promptly sent the stern Governor of Busreh to suppress the premature insurrection by putting the leaders at Kufa to death, and by despatching troops to intercept the grandson of the Prophet.

Husein and his few adherents were easily surrounded by the Syrian soldiery at Kerbela on the Euphrates; but so great was the reluctance to bear arms against the man whom they believed to be half-divine, that two of the leaders sent against him did their utmost to dissuade the Governor from proceeding to extremities. Their efforts were in vain, and on the tenth day the little band, perceiving that the end was very near, corded their tents closely to one another in order to keep off the onslaught of the Syrian horse.

Husein behaved throughout with unshaken courage, and on the morning of the fatal day he washed and perfumed himself, saying to his companions that he and they would soon be with the houris of Paradise; and when they had prayed all prepared themselves for the inevitable. Just before the fight began, one of the Syrian captains galloped into the doomed camp,

resolved to die with the man he looked upon as his lawful Khalif; and in another moment Shimr, who is execrated equally with the Khalif Yezid throughout the entire Shiah world, led his soldiers to the attack, and shot the first arrow with his own hand.

And now ensued many a pathetic incident, one being the death of Husein's baby-son in his father's arms, another the severing of his little nephew's hand by a sword. Husein himself was wounded again and again; but it seemed as if he bore a charmed life, until Shimr, by dint of threats, forced his unwilling soldiers to despatch him. It is said that this brutal commander galloped over the prostrate corpse of Ali's son with his cavalry, trampling it into the ground with savage fury, after which it was decapitated.

Thus was Husein slain on the 9th of October, A.D. 680, together with sixteen of his relatives; and Yezid's deed split up the Mohammedan world henceforth into the two great factions of Sunni and Shiah.

To put the matter shortly, the Sunnis, or "Traditionists," who are in a vast majority, acknowledge the first four Khalifs to be the rightful successors of Mohammed, and affirm that they are faithful to the traditions, as their name implies.

The Shiahs, or "Followers" of Ali, consider that the first three Khalifs were usurpers, and that Ali and his descendants are the true Imams, or leaders of the Faithful.

Persia became hotly Shiah, even when she was governed by Sunni rulers. At the present day Persians invoke the aid of Ali more frequently than that of the Prophet; they celebrate the death of Omar with rejoicings and bonfires in which he is burnt in effigy

like another Guy Fawkes ; and it is looked upon as a deadly insult if one man call another Yezid, or Shimr.

The first ten days of the lunar month of Muharram are dedicated to the memory of the Prophet's grandsons, and on each day some special incident of the tragedy of the plain of Kerbela is symbolised. For example, on one day the whole populace will gasp, hold their throats and exclaim, "I thirst!" in memory of the suffering undergone by the Faithful when they were cut off from the Euphrates by the soldiery during the heat of that Arabian October.

If a Persian boy is sickly in infancy, his parents often vow that if he survive he shall be a *sakka*, or water-carrier, in memory of the thirst endured by Husein and his followers. This means that from the age of five the boy will attend the *ruzakhana*, or recitations, during Muharram, and offer water or sherbet to the audience. He will be dressed in dark red or blue silk, velvet, or cotton, according to the rank of his parents, silver *Bismillahs* (in the Name of God) being sewn upon his garments, and a skin water-bottle strapped across his shoulders. He will pour out the iced liquid with his left hand into a metal saucer which he holds in his right, and passing through the audience will give refreshment to all who ask for it.

When Muharram begins, the devout give up shooting and their usual amusements. They dress in black, leaving part of the chest bare, and walk with naked feet in the different processions, beating their breasts with much vigour. Princes, merchants, and peasants often make a vow to join these processions for one, two, or more days, especially if they have recovered from any illness.

The fanatical are wrapped in white garments representing their shrouds, the idea being that they are ready to die for their faith; and armed with swords and knives, these men work themselves up to such a frenzy that they cut their heads and faces until the blood pours over their clothing. They might easily kill themselves in their zeal were they not attended by men carrying sticks, who strike up the weapons when the blood-letting has gone far enough, or stop any particularly dangerous slash; but even so these devotees often die from the after-effects of their wounds.

They will fasten padlocks into their cheeks; and yet in curious contrast to their almost maniacal self-mutilation and shriekings, they will halt quietly at some big house, and having partaken of sherbet and fruit, will go their way with renewed fervour.

Though sharing the same religious convictions, it is dangerous for these processions to meet one another, as in such a case they are certain to come to blows for the honour of Husein. At the present day the zealots are often armed with revolvers, and if the governor of a fanatical city such as Meshed did not insist that each procession should start at a different hour and should follow a specified route, many lives would, in all probability, be sacrificed.

The dervishes play a great part during Muharram, and have processions of their own in which they leap along with streaming hair, leopard skins being thrown over their white garments. With a discordant braying of cow-horns, and a fearsome yelling as they beat themselves with clubs and chains, they make their way to the houses of the Persian notables, who give them gifts and refreshments; but these noisy pro-



DASTEH OF 10TH MUHARRAM





professionals are very different to the fanatics who almost kill themselves for the exaltation of Husein.

On the tenth day of Muharram the climax of woe is reached, and all the processions call out "Husein is dead!" with the wildest laments, the very servants in European households going about barefoot in sign of grief, while every face looks pale and dejected. So universal is the mourning that the Persian equivalent of "To cry out before you are hurt," is, "He begins to weep before the recital of the death of Husein."

At Tehran there is a huge circular theatre, or *takieh*, for the representation of the "Passion Play" during the first ten days of Muharram. It is not roofed in, but covered with an awning during the representations, and all round it are boxes for the Shah and the aristocracy, the populace finding places in the arena. The hundreds of black-clad women and children sit in front of the stage, which is a round platform in the middle of the building; and behind them are the men.

To European eyes it is a curious thing to see perhaps three or four thousand women, not one of whom discloses her features, and who can only look through the strip of lacework inserted in the white cloth that hangs over her face. They all come very early in order to get good places on the mud floor on which they sit on their heels, and they drink sherbets and smoke *kalias* at intervals, listening to the exhortations of different *mullas* who try to work upon the emotions of the great crowd. At last barbaric music heralds the approach of the actors, who mount the steps leading to the platform, and the audience stops smoking and drinking and prepares itself for what follows. As no Mohammedan woman may appear in public, the

actors are all men and boys, who mostly play their parts well and with conviction, the honour of appearing in the *tazieh* often descending from father to son. Indeed parents in the audience will sometimes beg that their boys may be allowed to stand upon the stage for a short time in such parts as that of Husein's little nephew or of his infant son Abdullah. A Persian gentleman told the writer how when he was a boy of seven, sitting beside his mother at one of these plays, he was suddenly seized by an unknown actor and lifted upon the stage. He gave vent, however, to such lusty howls that he was speedily restored to his relative, who felt that a curse for life would rest upon her unlucky son on account of his indecorous conduct!

There are thirty to forty *taziehs*, some taken from Jewish legend, but naturally these do not interest the audience in the same way as the touching episodes relating to the events that took place on the desert plain of Kerbela.

Many of the actors are clad in suits of chain armour; there is no "scenery," but horses and camels give an air of reality to the moving tragedy of the "Family of the Tent." The European spectator speedily forgets the primitive *mise en scène*, and cannot fail to be impressed by the passionate emotion evinced by the great audience as the play proceeds. "*Ya Ali! Ya Husein!*" they ejaculate as they weep profusely, and Mr. S. G. W. Benjamin,<sup>1</sup> who has given a most interesting account of the Persian "Passion Play," writes of its effect on the onlookers: "For several moments sobs and sighs, and now and again a half-suppressed shriek, swept from one side of the building to the other. Strong men wept;

<sup>1</sup> "Persia and the Persians."

there was not a dry eye in the loggia where I was seated, except my own ; and I confess that I was not altogether unmoved by this impressive scene."

When the writer was staying at Ahwaz on the Karun river, she witnessed a curious representation of the death of Husein from the roof of the house in which she was living. Owing to the intense heat the *tazieh* took place after sunset in front of the governor's residence, the thudding of drums announcing the appearance of the actors who carried a small green canopied shrine. Behind this was borne a coffin, supposed to be that of Husein, draped in black and surmounted by a green turban. Horsemen in chain armour represented the adherents of the Prophet's grandson and their Arab assailants, and fought fiercely with one another, the large crowd present being apparently in imminent peril of wounds from the wildly brandished weapons, or of being trampled underfoot by the excited horses.

Throughout the performance the populace kept up a poignant lament, beating their bare breasts as they cried, "Hasan ! Husein !" in a monotonous iteration ; and as the excitement grew more intense they broke into a barbaric dance. The faces lit up by smoking torches were those of fanatics, and the whole performance, impressive in its sincerity, was very different to that given by a nomad tribe in south-east Persia. These people, after working themselves up to a tearful emotion, surprised the writer by suddenly giving a travesty of the solemn scene at which actors and spectators roared with ill-timed laughter.

Sir Lewis Pelly<sup>2</sup> and Count Gobineau have trans-

<sup>2</sup> "The Persian Miracle Play."

lated many of these *taziehs*, but space forbids me to give more than a *résumé* of one of them from the translation of the former. It is the "Death of Husein," and is acted on the tenth and great day of Muharram.

The grandson of the Prophet is depicted as lamenting his sad fate and approaching end, and is challenged by the accursed Shimr, who bids him leave his tent and meet his martyrdom. Upon this his sister Zainab comes to mourn with him the loss of his son Ali Akbar, the first of all the family to fall a victim ; of his brother Abbas, the standard-bearer ; of his nephew Kasim and his infant child Abdullah. Husein does his best to comfort her, commending his little daughter to her care, and he says last farewells to his other sister, to an old slave, and to his wife Shahrbanu, the Persian princess. Then he puts on a tattered shirt beneath his robes, telling Zainab that he trusts his enemies will be ashamed to strip him of this valueless garment after his death, and having refused the help of the King of the Fairies, he goes to meet the dagger of Shimr.

In his last moments he is consoled by apparitions of the Prophet and of Fatima his mother, and his dying words are, "O Lord, for the merit of me, the dear child of the Prophet ; O Lord, for the sad groaning of my miserable sister ; O Lord, for the sake of young Abbas rolling in his blood, even that young brother of mine that was equal to my soul, I pray thee, in the Day of Judgment, forgive, O merciful Lord, the sins of my grandfather's people, and grant me, bountifully, the key of the treasure of intercession."

These few words can give no idea of the pathos of many of the fifty-two scenes of this wonderful "Passion Play," which certainly has had a far greater influence on

the thousands who annually hear it recited than has any play that ever was written.

In the last scene of all the Resurrection is depicted, the Patriarchs and Prophets rising from their graves ; while the angel Gabriel tells Mohammed to hand the key of Paradise to Husein, saying, "The privilege of making intercession for sinners is exclusively his—Husein is by my peculiar grace the mediator for all."

Upon this the Prophet of Islam gives the key to his grandson with the words, "Deliver from the flames every one who in his lifetime shed but a single tear for thee, every one who has in any way helped thee, every one who has performed a pilgrimage to thy shrine or mourned for thee, and every one who has written tragic verses for thee. Bear each and all with thee to Paradise ;" and the scene ends with joyful sinners entering the abodes of the Blessed through the intercession of Husein.

It is no wonder that there is weeping in abundance on the anniversary of the Martyr's death, and these tears are often carefully collected by a priest and kept in a bottle, to be applied to the lips of the dying.

In cities such as Meshed, where the priests set their faces against theatrical representations, the populace attends *ruzakhana*, or recitals of the tragic tale, which are given by the *mullas* in different houses. Three or four priests will be hired by a pious man to give a recital, and the hearers attend in black clothes and carry large pocket-handkerchiefs. It is *de rigueur* to weep profusely, even though some priests have not the power of moving the listening crowds ; but to be unmoved stamps a man at once as an unbeliever. The priests say that such a one will be consigned to hell at

his death, while every tear shed in remembrance of Husein washes away many sins. Yet a spirit of levity occasionally creeps in even at these gatherings; for a Persian told the writer that he was thankful for his handkerchief when a very stout man among the audience wept so loudly in a high falsetto voice, with such an absurd resemblance to that of a woman, that it was difficult for him to refrain from bursts of unseemly laughter.

On the fortieth day after the anniversary of the death of Husein, some of the Muharram excitement is revived by a big procession, in which men and boys are dressed up to personate the Martyr and all the *dramatis personæ* of the "Passion Play." Representations of Husein's tomb at Kerbela and the mosque are carried; men, apparently decapitated, walk along, bearing their heads on poles; horsemen are clad in old chain armour and helmets; Husein's coffin draped in green is a conspicuous object; and any corpses on the way to the cemetery often join in the procession.

This is the last manifestation of Muharram, the celebration of which has moved the Shiah world to its depths, and during which the bulk of the populace would be capable of almost any act of self-devotion and also of any deed of wild hatred against the Sunni faction whom they look upon as the cause of Husein's untimely death. The grief for the martyrs and the anger against their enemies are over for that year; but the European spectator is left wondering whether any beneficial moral effect has resulted from so much unrestrained emotion.

## CHAPTER IX

### TRAVEL

TO enjoy travel in Persia a man ought to be strong and keen, of the type of those "who scorn delights and live laborious days," and, if possible, he should be endued with a dash of imagination, a taste for art, history, and sport, and an interest in his fellow-creatures. To such a traveller the time spent in Iran will be one of the most cherished memories of his life, a period when at his best he lived to the full, a haunting episode filling him now and again with a strange home-sickness.

When he is surrounded with the comforts of the West he will hear in fancy the cry of the *muezzin* ring out at dawn above some sleeping city; he will smell the hundred odours, pleasant or the reverse, that go to make up the never-to-be-forgotten aroma of an Asiatic bazaar; he will see again the long string of majestic camels with heads thrown high pursue their solemn way, their great spongy feet making hardly any sound on the sandy plain, and their sides hung with huge bales of merchandise. Perhaps a caravan of energetic mules jingling with bells will dispute the right of road with the "ships of the desert," and in a moment all will be noise and confusion. The charm of the solitude will

be broken, and the air rent with the yells and objurcations of camel-men and muleteers whose charges are inextricably mixed and out of hand. And the whole scene will be arched with a vault of so dazzling a blue that it seems to be composed of light itself, on either hand the strongly coloured mountain ranges revealing every seam and fissure in their sides beneath the pitiless noonday glare.

Or it may be that the traveller is riding on his way, shivering beneath his wraps in the cold wind that heralds in the dawn, and before him, as the veils of mist roll off from the hills, he will see the curious effects of refraction. Everything will be magnified to colossal proportions, a man on horseback seeming like a giant, and boulders assuming the strangest shapes as of palaces or of impregnable fastnesses. Perhaps seductive lakes fringed with palms and waving reeds will lure him on, though he knows full well that they are but an illusion, the mirage of the desert. In the words of Hafiz :—

“The fountain-head is far off in the desolate wilderness ;  
Beware lest the demon deceive thee with the mirage.”

Day after day he rides across vast plains separated from one another by mountain ranges, and that civilisation which in spite of himself has counted for so much in his life hitherto, seems to drop from him. Time has not the same meaning when there are no trains or steam-boats to be caught, and when he is surrounded by men whose favourite phrase is *Farda inshallah* (“To-morrow, please Allah”). He finds his tent a welcome change from the crowded hotels of the West, and any uneasy questionings as to life's problems



seem folly when an air that courses through the blood like wine, giving a sense of exhilaration and freedom, flows across expanses that invite the traveller to go ever forward. In such a climate the camp food tastes better than the choicest efforts of a Parisian *chef*, and a spring of good water is as nectar of the gods after probably much experience of water of varying degrees of flatness, brackishness, or even foulness.

And when the day's march is over, the traveller, strolling round camp before turning in, will visit the horses to whom he owes so much of his pleasure and comfort. They will lie picketed near at hand, warmly wrapped up in thick felts, and will neigh softly as he approaches them. Over all, the golden moon and constellations, that glow and throb with a lustre unknown to Western lands, hang like lamps in a sky of velvety purple, and as he lies down to rest on his hard camp mattress, he will be filled with a great content before he passes into sound and dreamless slumber. Is he not free from the shackles of civilisation, and leading that nomad existence the love of which lurks deep down in the hearts of most men?

In the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, who has eloquently sung the praises of such a life :—

"The untented Kosmos my abode,  
I pass a wilful stranger :  
My mistress, still the open Road,  
And the bright eyes of danger."

The last line of the stanza suggests what always underlies Persian travel—a sense of adventure, the feeling that perhaps some day Death may look the wanderer in the face. Such an idea gives a zest to the

long day's march, for "anything may happen" in passing through certain districts of Iran. A European, however, is seldom molested, as he has the reputation of being well armed, and the *tufangchis*, or guards, that patrol the roads, thrust themselves upon the traveller and give him hair-raising accounts of the vicinity of bandits merely to get money from him. In fact, before the present unrest, Persia was one of the safest countries in Asia in which to travel.

"Much travel is needed to ripen a man," say the Persians, and they also add, "He who has seen the world tells many a lie." Both proverbs are true in their case; for the European who is accompanied by servants accustomed to the march, will find them full of resource, willing, tireless, cheerful, and with a capacity for turning their hands to anything. If, however, he chance to hear them reciting their adventures when they have returned to the settled town-life, he will be almost stupefied at their powers of imagination, and at the ease with which they impose their "travellers' tales" on their credulous hearers.

Full of fascination as is travel in Persia, yet looked at from the point of view of the tourist, who carries Baedeker under his arm, there are but few "sights" to be visited. One town is much like another, and as a rule is built on a barren plain, which is sprinkled with patches of cultivation near the city and across which run chains of *kanat* mounds carrying the water from the nearest mountain streams.

The walls and the houses of the towns built of dun-coloured mud-bricks, would look intolerably mean were it not for the glitter of the tilework of the domes and minarets of some mosque or shrine, and

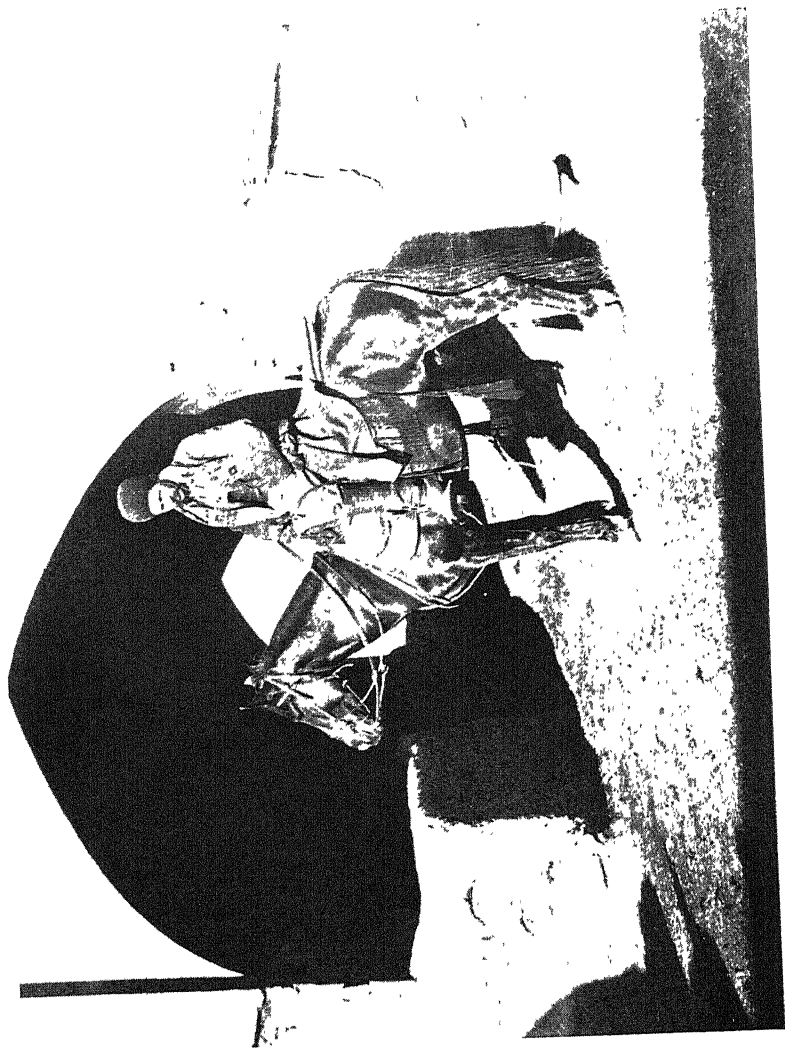
for the glorious sunshine which throws a glowing mantle over the most squalid details. And when the traveller has passed through the ornate gateway, probably badly in need of repair, of some town he may feel that there is little of interest for him to see because, being an unbeliever, he will not be allowed to enter a single mosque. In a city such as Meshed he will not even be able to look at the *outside* of the finest buildings close at hand. Certainly at Isfahan there are remains of the bygone splendour of the Sefavean kings; and the magnificent ruins of Persepolis, and the remarkable rock sculptures of Achæmenian and Sasanian monarchs would well repay many for the toil of the whole journey; but, these apart, there is very little to "see." The bazaars are much the same everywhere, and have a tiresome monotony of shoddy clothing, third-rate crockery, lamps and mirrors, with an equally tiresome lack of characteristic Oriental goods, the traveller hunting in vain among the myriad stalls which line the covered-in alleys for old carpets and metal-work, old silks and embroideries. Outside them, he will feel imprisoned between the high mud walls that enclose the network of narrow lanes often cobbled, and which are ankle deep in mud in wet weather and thick in dust during dry. He will pass miles of houses, the only indication of their whereabouts being a stout, low door in the concealing wall; and he will notice with what apparent secrecy both men and women make their exits and entrances, giving him the sense of being shut out from the lives of these strange people. Again, he who has longed for the East, and imagines it to be fraught with a certain magnificence, is disappointed at the

obvious need of repair of most of the buildings around him, at the dull clothing of the inhabitants, and the general poverty-stricken look of everything. On a grey day the impression left upon him will be one of unrelieved khaki colour, and he may ask himself why he came to such a land.

Nowadays carriages can be hired on all the main routes, but a few years ago there were only two ways of travelling in Persia; by *chapar*, or post, and by caravan. By the former the traveller rode through the country on post-horses—one for himself and one for his bedding and supplies—and was attended by a *shagird*, or post-boy, who took the often half-starved animals back at the end of each stage.

Sometimes there were no horses to be got at the *chapar-khana*, or post-house, in which case the traveller must halt in discomfort, or must take his tired steeds on for another stage. As his whole kit was squeezed into a pair of saddle-bags, he was not able to take much in the way of supplies, and, moreover, could get nothing save tea and bread at the halting-places. This inspired him to "beat the record" on his journey, and he would ride from dawn to sunset, proud of having done more miles than any predecessor, and callous as to the feelings of his overworked and underfed mounts. Often he arrived far from fit at his destination, and sometimes an attack of fever was the result of some sixty to a hundred miles a day, little sleep in dirty, vermin-haunted, perhaps crowded *chapar-khanas* and a *régime* of insufficient food.

The ideal mode of travel in Persia is to "caravan," that is, for the traveller to have his own horses, and hire



A PERSIAN GENTLEMAN ON THE ROAD



some mules to carry his tents, camp equipment, supplies, and servants, making him completely independent of rest-houses and knock-kneed *chapar* horses. The best time for his journey is during the spring or the autumn, the former being the only season in which flowers and greenery adorn the country. Moreover, the snow that blocks up many of the high passes is melting, and the days are longer than in the autumn. But during the day the heat in the south and on the lower parts of the Plateau is considerable, and insect life is active in the caravanserais. On the other hand, the cold is often intense in the winter during the night and early morning; but as soon as the sun has risen the climate reminds the traveller of that of some Swiss winter resort, with its floods of sunshine and dry and sparkling air.

In the summer heat all travelling must be done at night, and rest taken during the day—a difficult process when the air is resonant with flies, and the mosquito net to check their intrusions almost stifles the would-be sleeper.

Let us, however, follow a traveller at a time when heat and insects do not trouble, and let us suppose that he starts from Tehran in January on his ride south about half-way through the forty days of the "Great Cold." He has engaged a good road-servant and a groom to cook and look after him and the horses, the men being delighted to accompany him, for they get a *jira*. This means that their usual wages are half as much again in order to recoup them for the extra expense of food on the journey. They also get a month's wage before starting to be spent on suitable clothing for the expedition, and, moreover, they thoroughly enjoy travelling for its own sake, all Persians being nomads at

heart. The money question must be taken into consideration, for travel in Iran needs a good supply of ready cash. There is practically no gold coinage in the country, and the coin in current use is the silver *kran* (worth fourpence-halfpenny in 1909). Ten *krans* make up a *toman* (worth four shillings in 1909); but this coin is hardly ever seen, therefore bags full of heavy two-*kran* pieces must be carried to meet the expenses of the road.

The traveller has engaged a small caravan of mules under the leadership of a trusty *charvadar* (head muleteer), whose sturdy animals can do twenty-five miles a day if not too heavily loaded, and if given a day's rest at intervals. Some tinned meats, dried fruits, jam, and butter will greatly add to his comfort during the journey, also forage, charcoal, tea, flour, rice, and meat, sufficient to last until he reaches a town where fresh supplies may be purchased. A tent, camp-bedstead, folding-table, chair, and bath ensure luxury when compared with caravanserai accommodation; and the traveller ought to have his own saddle (with a felt *numneh* in case of sore backs), wear a felt slouch hat (to be exchanged for a pith helmet in hot weather) and carry blue goggles to save his eyes from the excessive glare. He needs warm clothing and plenty of wraps, also a mackintosh; and it is a wise precaution to bind flannel round his stirrups, as otherwise his feet will be half-frozen in cold weather. Lined Russian top-boots keep the legs warm; but stout English boots and gaiters are better for an active man who likes to dismount and lead his horse over bad going, or who wishes to try his luck with any game he may come across.



To "run" a caravan successfully is no easy matter, and the Sahib will find that tact and good temper are necessary; also some knowledge of the language, a comprehension of Oriental character, and an ability to turn his hand to anything. The muleteers are often independent and unruly, needing skilful management, and quarrels sometimes arise between these *gâtirchis* and the servants, the combatants resorting to blows. They may even use their knives with disastrous results if their master is not on the alert to smooth away any friction at the outset.

The Persian muleteer always finds it most difficult to tear himself from the fascinations of a town, and there are countless delays on the day of a start. Some are occasioned by the loads not being adjusted properly to the mules at first, or by various things being forgotten, but mostly by that kink in a *charvadar's* character which makes him so tiresome to deal with when he is in a city, though often one of the pleasantest, most honest, and hard-working of Persians when on the road.

The experienced traveller knowing this, arranges a short stage for the first day, a mere *nakl-i-makan* (change of place), as Persians term it, and probably will get no further on his way to Kum than the *mehman-khana* of Kahrisek, a few miles from Tehran. He will ride through a region of squalid lanes, and leave the capital by one of its grandiose gateways, near which runs the only railway in Persia, six miles in length, which he follows to the gold-domed shrine of Shah Abdul Azim, where Nasr-ed-Din Shah met his death from an assassin's bullet. From here the country is bare and deserted-looking, patches of snow lie on the ground and a keen wind is blowing from the white-covered mountain

ranges, making him glad to reach his destination. A *mehmankhana* is the best imitation of a hotel to be found outside Tehran, and these draughty buildings are erected at intervals along the road, built by an English Company, as far as Kum: they are actually provided with bedsteads, tables, and chairs, and follow their western models by presenting the traveller with a comparatively heavy bill on his departure. As his servant Akbar is accustomed to the road he will soon be in comfort. A *gilim*, or cotton-carpet, will be laid on the floor and another hung against the warped and rickety door, through which the winter blasts are howling; most buildings in Persia being constructed with an idea of letting in air during the summer heats rather than excluding it during the intense cold of winter. The *samovar*, with its core of burning charcoal, will be hissing merrily, providing tea to warm the traveller after his cold ride, and later on he will take his bath in front of a fire of blazing logs, coal being procurable only at the capital. His dinner, cooked with the aid of a most rudimentary *batterie de cuisine* over a small pot of charcoal, will perhaps consist of excellent soup, a *pilau*, a roast partridge, and a *compôte* of apricots served with custard. There is not much inducement to sit up late, as every one will henceforth rise before daybreak if long marches have to be made, and it is easier to keep warm in bed when the temperature is hardly above freezing-point, than beside a fire that seems to emit little heat and needs constant replenishment.

Our Sahib will be roused at dawn by his servant, to dress in a room full of cold draughts, and to find that the water in the camp basin is frozen over. While

he is hurriedly getting into his clothes, his camp equipment will be packed and carried out to be loaded up on the mules, and he will drink tea, eat some bread and eggs in haste, and will then go out to watch his caravan start off. Probably it will consist of three or four fine mules, hung with bells, the loads being carried on high pack-saddles, and the *charvadar's* horse, adorned with many-coloured worsted trappings, heading the procession—an evil custom, for if the animal happen to die during the journey the mules will refuse to start on the day's march without their leader. The muleteers wear striped sacking coats over their shirts, and have great felt cloaks for cold weather and in which to sleep at night, their footgear being the *giva*, or cotton shoe, of the country with its rag sole. Their felt skull-caps are swathed with coloured hankerchiefs, and a belt carries their knife, pipe, packing-needle and string, whip and money-bag. They are handsome, wiry fellows, and walk alongside their charges urging them on with cries, but seldom belabouring them with the long staves that they carry. At last everything is loaded up, and the traveller, after seeing the animals well on their way, mounts his steed and canters after them along the road, on either side of which stretches a dreary plain bounded by ranges of hills. He and his servant will probably forge on ahead and halt for an hour about eleven o'clock for lunch, the mules passing them on their way to the night's resting-place. Distance in Persia is spoken of by the term *farsakh*, a measurement of some three and a half to four miles, and, as may be imagined, is not computed with strict accuracy by the natives, and differs according to the difficulty of the road.

The chief point of note on the third march from Tehran, is the gloomy defile of the "Valley of the Angel of Death," which is interesting as being the *mise en scène* for many of the "ghoul" stories of Persia. To the ordinary traveller there is nothing particularly awe-inspiring about it, and certainly it is easier to negotiate than many other passes to be met with in the country. When this region is left behind, that "abomination of desolation," the great *kavir*, or salt, desert is seen, stretching far away on the horizon. Persians credit Shimr, the murderer of their beloved Imam Husein, with having caused this terrible waste, asserting, with no regard to geographical probability, that he fled here after he had slain the Prophet's grandson at Kerbela on the Euphrates, and that on his approach the fertile ground at once turned into a huge salt marsh.

And further on a salt lake with brilliantly blue waters has to be skirted, and Akbar will tell his Sahib that some thirty odd years ago the old road to Kum passed across its bed, and a large caravanserai gave shelter to travellers. The vizier of the day, however, was determined that the present road should be used by all and sundry, and he thought that he could effect this by removing the dam of a river and flooding the old route. His plan was almost too successful, for not only were the road and caravanserai submerged, but many miles of the plain were turned into the present lake, and the muleteers were forced to pay dues for using the new road in which the Prime Minister was pecuniarily interested.

Some twenty miles from Kum a low pass is crossed, from the top of which the golden-domed Mosque of

Fatima is clearly seen, the town lying beneath a curious double hill. Little piles of stones are on either side of the track, having been thrown there by the Faithful to indicate that from this spot they have caught their first glimpse of the shrine to which they are making a pilgrimage. The rest of the way is along a broad road, on either side of which stretches the salt desert, and the inexperienced would be engulfed in its numerous quicksands, did they venture upon it without a guide. Fatima, the sister of the Imam Reza, in whose honour the magnificent shrine at Meshed was built, is the patron saint of Kum, having died here when on her way to visit her brother at Meshed, and tradition affirms that the Eighth Imam visits his sister every Friday. The present mosque has a gold-covered dome and two gold-topped minarets in the original design, but the Vizier of Nasr-ed-Din Shah added two huge tiled *minars* much later, which destroy the symmetry of the building. Fraser,<sup>1</sup> who visited the mosque in 1821 in disguise, speaks of the magnificence of Fatima's tomb, which is enclosed by a massive silver grating, above which hangs the sword of Shah Abbas, and he comments on the beauty of the tilework and mosaic. Next to Meshed it is the great centre of pilgrimage in Persia, thousands of flat graves, as at Meshed, covering the space round the building outside. Women especially favour this shrine, and it is curious that the honour paid to Fatima, and also to her ancestress the Fatima, who was the Prophet's daughter, has not raised the position of the weaker sex with Moslems.

The people of Kum are very fanatical, and on the morrow, as the traveller rides through the bazaar, he will

<sup>1</sup> "A Journey in Khorasan."

have many a hostile glance from the hundreds of felt-capped Persians busy with their different trades or chaffering as they buy their day's supplies.

It will be a relief to emerge on to the deserted plains, and late that afternoon the tents will be pitched, and real camp life will commence. The Sahib will, if possible, choose a spot that has not been used by caravans, scanning the ground narrowly for ticks, as these horrible insects are always left wherever camels have lain; and he will try to camp above any village in order to draw his water from the *kanat* before it has been polluted. Then begins the unloading of the mules, which has to be done in haste, so eager are the animals for a roll in the dust; and the tents are put up with a good deal of fuss, and complaints that the pegs have been lost, one of the guy-ropes broken, and so on. At last they are pitched; the muleteers have curry-combed their charges with an iron implement that makes a rattling noise; and the groom has fed the horses and covered them up with their felt night-clothing. Their master, clad in thick ulster and cap, is jotting down notes in his diary by the light of a candle with a glass shade to prevent it flickering in the night air, and impatiently shouting to know why his dinner is so long in coming. A clatter of plates, and Akbar arrives with the soup, usually lukewarm, other courses following in time, and when the meal is finished the Englishman strolls about the plain for a smoke before he turns in.

The moon and stars shine with a cold brilliance, Persians saying that the latter are holes in the flooring of heaven to let God's glory shine through; from the mysterious depths of the long shadows cast by the mountains a jackal will suddenly steal past like

a ghost, to be followed by others on their way to join the pack in its nightly hunt for food, and surely that skulking, hump-backed form with its shambling gait can be no other than the hyæna? The little owls utter their plaintive cry; the great screech owl shrieks like a badly wounded dog; and, once out of the reach of the ceaseless *gufti-gu* (chatter) of his dependents, the traveller will hear a score of night noises—weird sounds that he cannot locate, eerie rustlings and patterings that make him understand the whole-hearted Persian belief in ghouls and *jinn*s.

Between Kum and the next town—Kashan—there is little life to be seen and hardly any cultivation, the patches of salt lying on the barren plains showing the proximity of the great salt desert, and the mountain ranges sharply outlined against the cerulean heaven being destitute of vegetation. Majestic Demavend, monarch of the snowy Elburz range, is clearly visible as far as Kashan, a distance of some hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies, and the traveller often turns in his saddle to have a look at the fine peak that becomes more and more isolated the further he leaves it behind him, until at last its attendant mountains have all vanished and the triangular cone stands up without a rival, pale and ghostly, against the blue background.

A lofty leaning minaret is the most striking object in the town that has given its name to the beautiful *kashi*, or tiles, for which Persia is celebrated: it is also the centre of the silk industry.

Every writer speaks of the virulence and abundance of the scorpions found here, "May you be stung by a Kashan scorpion" being a popular curse; and the inhabitants are credited with a cowardice far surpassing

that of the ordinary Persian city-dweller. Sir J. Malcolm<sup>1</sup> relates that thirty thousand soldiers of Kashan and Isfahan, when disbanded by Nadir Shah, asked that monarch to give them an escort of a hundred soldiers to take them safely home. The Shah, with whom personal courage counted above all virtues, is reported to have said that he regretted his days of brigandage were over, as he would have enjoyed looting such an army of poltroons !

Four miles from Kashan is the lovely garden of Fin, in which is a palace built by Fath Ali Shah, falling into ruin. Here between avenues of cypresses water runs over channels lined with blue and green tiles, and portraits of the builder and his many sons are frescoed on the walls and archways. The visitor will be told how Mirza Taki Khan, the able Vizier of Nasr-ed-Din Shah and husband of his royal master's sister, met his death here. The courtiers stirred up the Shah's jealousy against his minister, who was banished to this garden. Though he was watched night and day with a passionate affection by his royal wife, yet means were found to despatch him when she was off her guard, and a man who might have done much for his country was lost to Persia.

The traveller orders an early start when he is about to leave Kashan, and his servant packs his personal equipment in good time, but, as usual, the muleteers are not forthcoming. In spite of messengers sent to the caravanserai in which they and their animals are lodged, it is past ten o'clock before they make their appearance at the telegraph office and begin to load up. Even then they profess to have mislaid something at

<sup>1</sup> "Persian Sketches."



the *serai* and must go to retrieve it. A rope or a piece of *gillim* has been forgotten, so that the sun is high in the heavens before the broken-down buildings of dilapidated Kashan are left behind and the caravan, passing through a zone of cultivation, emerges on to the usual barren plain on its way to Isfahan.

The traveller soon comes across one of the few public works of Persia in the shape of a barrier, partly natural and partly artificial, by which the Kohrud river is dammed up right across the valley. This work was executed in the beneficent reign of Shah Abbas in order to give water to Kashan during the hot weather, and, passing along the lake thus formed, the village of Kohrud, which stands at a height of 7,000 feet, is reached. As the night will in consequence be bitterly cold every one is thankful to seek shelter in the *chapar-khana*. As a rule, these buildings consist of some rooms and stables built round a courtyard, but above the entrance gateway are a couple of rooms for the accommodation of better-class travellers and approached by steps of abnormal height. Up these the rider, stiff from the saddle, will stumble, calling to the keeper of the post-house to bring firewood and a *samovar*. While he is waiting for these comforts he will be amused to observe that the Persian traveller is in the habit of scribbling his name on the walls of *chapar-khanas* and caravanserais as much or even more than the British tourist, so often abused for this habit; the Oriental being fond also of writing quotations from his favourite poets. The next day's stage to Soh may be most wearisome, for snow often falls on the pass which has to be crossed, the track is then obliterated, and the mules, blundering into drifts, fall over and have to be

unloaded before they can regain their feet. The Sahib, leading his horse, will plough his way as best he can, wearing blue glasses, as the glare from the snow when the sun shines on it is dazzling in the extreme, and the caravan will arrive late and worn out after only a twenty-mile march, warmth, food, and rest being ardently desired by all.

During the next day, though the pass has been crossed and the track that leaves the hilly country and emerges on to the great Isfahan plain is denuded of the hampering snow, yet a blizzard is raging. The icy blast seems to blow right through the traveller's wraps as if they had been made of paper, and his horse becomes unmanageable as it refuses to face the bitter wind that lashes it like a whip. The only thing to be done is to press forward, as there is no shelter within several miles, and were the caravan to return on its tracks it would encounter blinding snow on the pass above instead of the sleet, and probably lose its way in the maze of hills, all the paths being obliterated. The muleteers, enveloped in great felt cloaks, hurry their unwilling charges along as best they can to the accompaniment of shouts and yells, and the Sahib is forced to urge his trembling steed with whip and spurs. A deadly numbing cold seems gaining upon him, and as the hours go by his limbs appear to be getting paralysed, when suddenly the sun shines from the steely-blue, pitiless heaven, and the sleet-laden wind abates. "*Alhamdulillah!*" shouts the *charvadar*; men and animals take heart again, and after a short halt cheerily proceed on their way, reaching the old capital of the Sefavi kings a couple of days later.

The last stage into Isfahan is a short one, as Persians

love to get into a town early in order to wash and put on their good clothes, telling the Sahib that they could not possibly appear in the bazaar in travel-stained garments, as if they did so the Isfahanis would get a bad impression of their employer as well as of themselves. This apparent care for their master's reputation is not altogether due to that *tashakhus*, or love of show, that most Persians possess in abundance, but from a wish that the establishment to which they belong at the time shall "put its best foot foremost" so to speak. It is always an effective rebuke to tell a servant that his conduct has given the house a *bad nam* (bad name).

As so much has been written about Isfahan, its past splendours and the relics of them that still survive, it will be enough to say that Shah Abbas selected the city for the seat of government as being in the heart of his empire, and that he beautified it with splendid mosques and palaces, avenues of trees, and wonderful bridges. Here ambassadors from many European countries visited him, also foreigners in search of trade, and one and all bore testimony to the magnificence of the sovereign, his Court, and his capital, and to the prosperity of the country under his sway. Of course there must have been filth and squalor, lack of drainage, narrow lanes, and insanitary dwellings, just as at the present day, but there must also have been plenty of commerce, and an encouragement of trade and the arts such as has never been known since, giving some foundation to the Persian saying, "*Isfahan nisf i jehan*" (Isfahan is half the world). An educated Isfahani remarked to the writer that the reigning dynasty being of Turkish origin, had no æsthetic sense, and would not

disburse a *kran* to keep in repair the magnificent works of their predecessors on the throne, but even destroyed them in some cases, the Zil-es-Sultan, for example, ruthlessly cutting down the splendid avenues of *chenars* planted by Shah Abbas, which were not only a thing of beauty, but were an inestimable boon to the city during the intense heat of the summer. This conduct he ascribed to a kind of jealous rivalry that will impel a Shah to gild the dome of the shrine at Meshed—a deed that will blazon forth his generosity and religious zeal to the entire kingdom—but will not permit him to keep up roads or bridges, the work of bygone benefactors.

The inhabitants of Isfahan are credited with being niggardly in the extreme, and the Persian proverb to describe a miser, "He puts his cheese in a bottle and rubs his bread on the outside," is supposed to be derived from the avarice of an Isfahan merchant. This worthy, together with his unfortunate apprentice, lived entirely on bread which the pair were wont to rub against a bottle in which was a piece of cheese, in order to give it an imaginary flavour of this latter. The story goes on to say that the merchant, on leaving the house one day, locked up the room in which was this bottle, and on being pursued by his luckless *shagird*, who said that he could not swallow his bread without the accustomed relish, the merchant advised him to return and rub it on the closed door!

The Persians have a saying by which they seek to account for the almost inexplicable fascination of the "open road," *Musáfir misl i diváneḥ ast* (The traveller is like a madman), and the Englishman is longing to start off on the march again and has no desire to linger

among the departed glories of Isfahan. He needs to see the red streak widen in the East day after day—that harbinger of Aurora, who when she appears is often surrounded by masses of tiny rosy clouds that vanish as soon as the Sun God leaps into the pale-blue sky and prepares to drive his chariot across the firmament. This daily marvel of the dawn never becomes commonplace, and seems to lift for a brief moment the veil that hangs over the heart of things, and to draw the traveller closer to the great mother, Nature.

The Desert City of Yezd will be his next halting-place, and as he has made a *détour* to visit the old capital of Persia, the party now travels by little-known tracks through a hilly country where the water is disagreeably brackish, and past quaint villages seldom visited by Europeans.

One of these hamlets, almost as curious in its way as the remarkable village of Yezdikhast, is built on the spur of a mountain, the mud houses hanging over the precipice. In some cases the dwellings themselves are burrowed out of the living rock, the whole looking particularly insecure, though affording an impregnable refuge for the inhabitants in the old raiding days. The weather keeps cold, and a tent is an airy apartment during the hasty morning toilet, when a bitter wind seems to be invariably blowing; and one never-to-be-forgotten night the traveller is awakened by his canvas home falling upon him, the pegs and pole torn up by a howling blast, and his equipment blown out into the darkness. It is a time of lamentation and discomfort. The cook screams out that his *resazi*, or padded quilt, has vanished; the muleteers complain of various personal losses, swearing by Ali and all the Imams that *jinn*s are

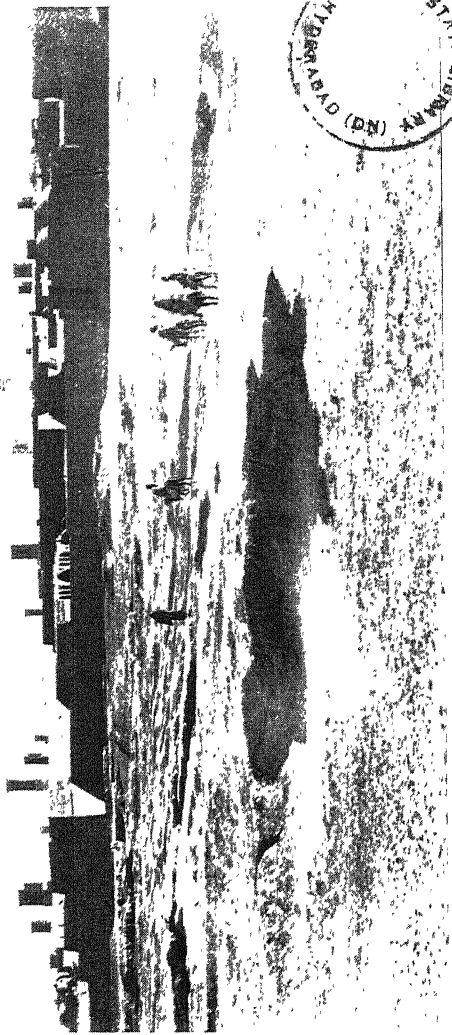
at the bottom of the turmoil; and as no tent can stand against the fury of the elements, all take what shelter they can and await the dawn in no cheerful spirit.

The one ray of comfort in the situation is that the furious wind keeps the rain off; but on the morrow, when the gale goes down, a heavy deluge descends, and everybody and everything are soaked, save perhaps the traveller's bedding in its waterproof valise. Even Akbar, paragon of servants, is grumbling, the dinner provided is a poor one, and all go to rest very early, the steady downpour making its way at last through the stout canvas of the tents in long streaks of wet.

But such incidents as these are soon forgotten when next morning the sun shines as usual in undisputed majesty, and the Sahib halts for a day in order to try and bring down a mountain sheep, and also to allow everything to be thoroughly dried. A native *shikarchi* guides him up the mountain, and after many hours of climbing and stalking, he returns to the camp in triumph with a fine quarry, which provides master and men with a sumptuous supper: its skull and horns are preserved as a trophy that proudly surmounts one of the mule loads during the rest of the journey.

The next *contre-temps* that occurs—one by no means uncommon in Persian travel—is that the party loses its way, and instead of reaching Taft, a charming village near Yezd, is forced to halt for the night on a barren stretch of ground near a brackish stream.

Every one talks of "roads" in Persia, but these are usually a series of parallel tracks made by the *kafilas* (caravans) during many centuries, and if the route leads up dry river-beds, sown with boulders, or across patches of hard gravel, or bed-rock, it is often indistinguishable.



YEZD





Moreover, there are dozens of false tracks leading apparently nowhere in particular, and it is one of these that has misled the caravan; and the mules have plodded laboriously over more than a *farsakk* of stony ground before the mistake is discovered. Then ensues the wearisome return and the anxious search for the right road, which, when found, cannot be followed, as the February night is ominously near; for there is practically no twilight in Persia, but an almost sudden step from sunset into darkness. It takes longer to pitch the tents than usual, and the traveller who has eaten nothing since a hasty lunch at 10.30 a.m., feels his entire stock of patience vanish abruptly when he observes that the hands of his watch point to 10.30 p.m., and that his evening meal still tarries. At last, after constant calls to Akbar, answered by as constant "*Bi chashm, bi chashm, Sahib!*" (By my eyes), that henchman appears with the much-needed food, and his master falls to with a gusto that he has seldom, if ever, experienced at home; and immediately after eating he follows the Persian custom of going to bed at once.

The last march into Yezd lies through a great amphitheatre of mountains that open out into a superb pass of castellated limestone cliffs, grand beyond description, and forming a romantic setting for the Desert City, as it lies in a blue haze in the distance. The delightful village of Taft, refuge of well-to-do Yezdis during the hot weather, is now passed, and the traveller here notices the *Gabrs*, or Zoroastrians, labouring in helmet-shaped felt caps, and admires their picturesquely-clad women. The caravan then picks its way along the stony bed of a dried-up watercourse and emerges on to the plain on which

Yezd stands, the city looking drearier than most Persian towns from the absence of any vegetation near it, loose sand not being a favourable soil in which to raise crops. The new arrivals are struck by the countless *badgirs*, or wind-towers, which are far more prominent than the *minars* of the mosques, and their number bears eloquent testimony to the heat of the summer, the inhabitants retiring to underground rooms beneath these air-shafts, as soon as it becomes oppressively hot.

The little English colony will probably put the traveller up, and after his tent-life in the cold uplands he will find his first night in a room furnished in European style a most disagreeable experience, and will feel almost suffocated by the closeness of the atmosphere in comparison with his airy tent, through the canvas of which all the winds of heaven appeared to blow. It will be long before he falls into a disturbed, unrefreshing sleep, and he will sally out on the morrow to see the sights of Yezd in a weary frame of mind.

The town, he will be told, is second only to Tabriz and Isfahan in commercial importance, and produces beautiful silk materials, but he will be more interested in seeing the oft-persecuted Zoroastrians, the remnant of the pure Iranian race, whom he will speedily recognise by the ugly yellow hue of their garments. He will be told that among other irritating restrictions, they are not allowed to build *badgirs* to their houses, to wear spectacles, or to ride horses. Yet, in spite of everything, they have clung tenaciously to their religion, and have not intermarried with their conquerors. The *dakmehs* where their dead are exposed, are built on low hills a few miles from the

city, and the more ancient of these "towers of silence" can be inspected from a neighbouring mountain spur, and contains a huge collection of skulls and bones picked clean by the birds of prey. But in spite of much kindly hospitality, the traveller is impatient to start on his two-hundred-mile ride to Kerman, his next halt, as he has far to go before he reaches the coast. Accordingly, after the usual exasperating delays which occur on leaving any town, and which by now he accepts in a philosophical spirit, he starts off with some of his new friends who speed him on his way by riding a *farsakh* with him. The weather is stormy, harbinger of the spring, and as high winds and heavy downpours are frequent the party takes refuge at night in the post-houses built at intervals on the sandy plains, over which *jinn*s, as Persians call the columns of sand, whirl.

The *chapar-khana* of Shemsh as it stands, together with a caravanserai, in solitary state on an absolutely barren stretch of salt-strewn desert, gives an impression of desolation hardly to be surpassed even in Persia; and the effect is heightened when it is discovered that the stream running near by is so brackish that a European can scarcely touch it even when it is served to him in the form of tea.

Shortly after leaving this dreary halting-place, the *kafila* encounters a dust-storm. The whole landscape is suddenly blotted out by a great dusky cloud, the radiantly shining sun becomes a mere white blur, and the sand is driven along by the wind with a curious swishing sound. As the track is hidden, except when the blast whirls the sand from it at intervals, the party closes up, the men muffling their heads and yelling at

their lagging and frightened charges, and the traveller hastily donning his goggles to save his eyes from the grit.

Progress is now slow in the extreme, for the track, which is often difficult to find in daylight, is almost impossible to follow when only fleeting glimpses are obtainable of it; but eventually men and animals arrive late and sore-eyed at the post-house. The Sahib insists that his dependants should bathe their eyes with boracic lotion, and finds that Persians have a strange dislike to washing their organs of sight if they are at all inflamed, this misguided idea and the lack of brims to their felt caps, leading to half the cases of ophthalmia so common in the country.

Though the wind is often violent, yet rain only falls now and then on the parched plains; and one day the traveller, halting for lunch beside a running stream, was astonished to find that the whole of the water had vanished and left the bed dry while he was eating. But before it reaches Kerman, the caravan has the unusual experience of being obliged to wade through a mile of flooded country surrounding the town of Bahramabad. The muleteers dash knee-deep into the flood, probing the bottom with their staves to find out any holes, and during the process one man disappears into an unsuspected pit, and is fished out half-drowned. The mules move forward warily, stopping every moment to try and test the ground with their hoofs; but at intervals one after another roll over, and have to be unloaded with much objurgation before they can recover their feet. The traveller, after being unhorsed once, thinks it wiser to splash along on foot, leading his steed that snorts with terror and tries to break away whenever a mule

falls headlong into the flood. Fortunately a villager makes his appearance as they near the town, and offers to guide them through the maze of irrigation channels, now deep and muddy streams, that surround Bahramabad, telling them that half the houses are in ruins owing to the unusually heavy rain. It is with great relief that the dirty and dripping party enter the gate of the town, and seek the dubious hospitality of the caravanserai which, to their dismay, they find almost uninhabitable, part of the roof having fallen in and the courtyard being a morass of indescribable filth. Not even the *charvadar* wishes to halt more than a night in this comfortless place, and next morning the *kafila* makes its way gingerly through the town, getting one of the citizens to lead it along the flooded lanes between the gutted mud houses, for in places the road is swept away altogether. At last the city gate is passed, and the party is among a belt of cultivated ground before it reaches the sandy desert again on its way to Kabutarkhan.

And from here onwards the long plain across which men and animals have toiled since leaving Yezd begins to close in, and the mountain ranges come nearer together, Kerman itself appearing to lie surrounded by hills on all sides. When the Sahib at last reaches the city, the British Consul offers hospitality to his countryman in a charming house which lies in the garden-quarter outside the town, and has a good view of the two picturesque limestone spurs on which were erected the fortresses of Sasanian days.

Nowadays all that is to be seen of the city, that once lay between them, are heaps of mud ruins carried away daily on donkeys to act as manure, and littered with scraps of the beautiful lustre tiles for which Persia was

formerly so famous. The modern town is built on only a quarter of the site that it occupied in the days when the commerce of the East poured through it on its way north ; and the inhuman Agha Mohammed Khan dealt the final blow to its prosperity when he sacked Kerman in 1794 and blinded the majority of its inhabitants. The visitor notices the poverty-stricken look of the place, surrounded as it is by ruins, and remarkable even in Iran for the number of its beggars, and there are no fine mosques or public buildings to be seen in the narrow lanes in which are frequent holes. The beautiful carpets made in the town will attract him ; but if he visits a factory and observes that the children who make the artistic fabrics are crippled and deformed from the long hours of work, and diseased from the dark, damp places in which they are forced to spend their days of labour, he will feel that the price of Kerman carpets is a heavy one ; for the health and often the lives of countless little ones have been lost in the making of them.

There is not much of interest to be seen in the neighbourhood, the city lying on the edge of the great desert, and being supplied with water from the many fine ranges of hills in its near vicinity. The old chroniclers, however, write that Kerman was once famous for its rose-gardens that produced half the attar of roses of commerce, and that its hundreds of wells made it one of the most fertile districts in Persia. At the present time there is practically but one tree in the environs of the city (of course not including the private gardens), and this plane is a prominent landmark for miles, bearing pathetic testimony to the work of deforestation that has largely contributed towards the sterility of Persia.

The Fire Worshippers held out for long in the Province of Kerman against their Arab invaders, and Zoroastrians still survive here in some numbers, their *dakmehs* being built on low hills in a desert region a few miles from the city.

But the traveller, eager to press southwards to the coast, dares not linger at Kerman, as he dreads the intense heat of Baluchistan, where, according to the Persians, the sun, even during the spring, is powerful enough to cook eggs if they are exposed to its burning rays. He has now to reorganise his caravan, because his *charvadar* refuses to venture his mules in the wilds of Baluchistan. All Persians have a horror of this country, which they say equals the Infernal Regions in heat, and which is peopled by Sunnis, worthy inhabitants of such a land. Therefore six or seven camels are engaged to carry the Sahib's servants and belongings down to Gwadur, these slowly-moving, evil-smelling beasts being able to pick up a good living from the camel-thorn everywhere abundant, and also being capable of going without water for some days if necessary. Akbar and the groom complain at first at being obliged to exchange their briskly-stepping mules for a camel, as they suffer agonies of sea-sickness until they get accustomed to the lurching movements of their new steeds.

Supplies of all kinds must be taken ; forage for the horses, and barley-meal with which to give the camels a feed at night ; also a couple of wooden water-barrels, because a corner of the great waterless Lut has to be crossed. The Sahib sees that his servants have movable shades to their hats, and looks to his own pith-helmet and blue glasses ; for the glorious Persian

sun that has shone above him hitherto will turn into a dreaded enemy when he has left the lofty plateau and descended into low-lying country.

He and his caravan start off early in March, making their way across the sand hummocks of the Kerman Desert to the little village of Mahun, not far from the magnificent Jupar range. Both men and horses are in excellent spirits, the crisp air having such an exhilarating effect on the latter that the Sahib's favourite Arab carries its rider up and down the sand-heaps with the buoyancy of a boy at play, and races along the track far ahead of the mules, giving bucks at intervals, to let off its high spirits. Like many of its kind it is very docile, and when not ridden it trots along with the caravan, and if it lags behind comes like a dog at the groom's call. Much of the traveller's keen pleasure in his journey is owing to Raksh and to the big raw-boned Turkoman, Shaitan; and he is determined to take both these friends with him when he returns to India.

When the party reaches Mahun it halts in a beautiful pleasaunce that in spring and summer is one of the loveliest in Persia, its fountains and cascades, its trees and flowers making it a veritable enchanted garden in comparison with the dreary desert on all sides of it. From here the way leads into the hills, and the next night, owing to the cold, is passed in a dirty caravan-serai, its mud-built rooms being without doors or windows, and the party being almost blinded by the volumes of smoke when they attempt to light fires.

As the marches are long and the camels go slowly, every one is up before sunrise, and the traveller sees the "false dawn," that strange, eerie light that appears and disappears before a crimson point in the East betokens



the advent of a new day. A chilly wind invariably blows at this hour, and the Englishman will lead his horse for a couple of miles to warm himself before mounting ; such conduct being looked upon as little short of lunacy by Persians, who never walk a step if they can help it, and consider it *infra dig.* for a man to do so if he has a steed to carry him. Plain after plain stretches in a wearisome monotony ; range after range of barren mountains, often with finely serrated outline and colouring, divide the plains ; and if a stream of water with verdure on its banks be reached, the party hail it with delight. At one part of the road it seems as if a great avalanche of mud had overwhelmed the district in prehistoric days, and receding had left a hundred weird, fantastic shapes. Pinnacles and columns, huge animal forms that could only be seen in a nightmare, bastions and castles, rise up on all sides round the party, and Akbar and the *shuturchis* (camel-men) call out to one another that they are in the country of the demons, and it is well for every one that they have not wandered into this enchanted district after sunset.

A few days after leaving the snowy peaks and ice-bound streams of the Kerman highlands, Bam, the frontier town of Persia previous to the annexation of Baluchistan, is reached ; and in this district of date-palms, pampas grass, and running streams will be felt the first touch of the oppressive heat to be encountered later on. The town, mainly a collection of palm-leaf matting hovels, and dominated by a picturesque fortress built on a mountain spur, seems stifling as it lies embosomed in feathery date-trees. After fresh supplies of rice, flour, tea, and sugar have been laid in, the camels leave behind them the spot where the ill-fated

Lutf Ali Khan, the last of the Zend dynasty, was treacherously captured, and push southward to Regan, beyond which village Persian Baluchistan is entered. Owing to the abundance of water, the country here is wooded. Great plummy tamarisk-trees, starred with rosy blossom, acacias, feathery pampas, and the *konar*-tree all grow luxuriantly, and in the distance the splendid cone of the extinct volcano Kuh-i-Basman stands up superbly. The strident note of the francolin is heard everywhere; and the traveller sallying out with his gun has such good luck that all fare sumptuously for a couple of days on these fine partridges.

But this life and vegetation are merely a fringe on the edge of the desolate Lut, and now the caravan enters Baluchistan. This is a country where the *débris* from the low, mean-looking hills is scattered so thickly over the valleys that fast riding is dangerous; where the tamarisk scrub and palmetto flourish; and where the water-supply is frequently of the scantiest and more often brackish than sweet. It is an unprepossessing-looking land, and the inhabitants, who live usually in shanties of palm-leaf matting, are far darker and smaller than the Persians and in some parts show signs of negro origin. The national costume of the men consists of a long shirt, baggy trousers, and big turban, all of white cotton, and would be a becoming one were it not usually so badly in need of washing. Their greasy black hair is, as a rule, uncut and matted, but the young dandies affect bunches of curls hanging over the ears; and a long ringlet, shining with oil, often trails down the chest. All are careful to pluck out the centre of their beards and moustaches in order that these

adornments may not be defiled if their possessors drink wine, and this custom gives them a curious appearance.

The women, poor things ! thin, ugly, and prematurely aged, wear long black or white woollen garments with black veils over their heads ; but leave their faces uncovered, this dress making them look curiously like nuns, as they glide in and out of their squalid palm-leaf huts. Both men and women are utterly uncivilised and ignorant when compared with the Persians, and are incorrigibly lazy and "slack." This the traveller finds to his cost if he has much to do with Baluchi camel-drivers, those once in the employ of Major Sykes<sup>1</sup> asserting that their camels could not march at night and must graze all day !

They are all strict Sunnis, and bear an unextinguishable grudge against the Shiah Persians who conquered them some fifty years ago ; and the Sahib will have to keep his followers well in hand in order to prevent friction arising on religious grounds. For example, if his servants, following the common Persian custom, vituperate the Khalif Omar, a fight will almost certainly take place between them and the fanatical Baluchis.

Now and again a village will boast a tiny mud-built mosque with a low roof of palm-beams ; but the religious life of the people appears to be chiefly centred in the shrines. These *ziarats* are met with everywhere, and are large cairns of stones on which are placed sticks to impale the fluttering rags torn from the garments of those who hope to gain some favour from the saint buried beneath. Sometimes the shrine is hung with camel-bells, presumably to call the holy

<sup>1</sup> "Ten Thousand Miles in Persia."

man's attention to the petitions offered up, and they are usually adorned with the horns of ibex and moufflon to signify power.

Mr. Floyer,<sup>1</sup> however, considers that half these cairns are frauds, as he himself walking on ahead of his caravan, used sometimes to collect a few stones together, and he noticed that when his native camel-men reached the spot, one and all would add to the heap.

Palms are the chief source of wealth in Baluchistan, a man's worldly position being regulated by the number of date-trees he possesses; and when the caravan reaches some oasis in the general sterility, the groves of waving palms beside rippling streams and the green of springing wheat and barley will appear like an earthly paradise in contrast to the sandy desert that stretches on all sides.

After the picturesque mud-built fortress of a village is left behind him, the traveller may march through a region of black and reddish-coloured volcanic hills, where not a bird or an animal is to be seen, the only signs of life being small lizards, their colouring imitating so exactly the *débris* littering the valleys that it is impossible to distinguish them when motionless. This gloomy district will be full of strange echoes, and weird cries will be heard that cause the party to keep as near the Sahib as possible, all Persians believing that if they are in the company of an European no *jinn* or ghoul can appear.

Later on the Bampur river will be struck, and the groups of lofty tamarisks, oleanders poisonous to the unwary camel, and occasional clumps of graceful palms,

<sup>1</sup> "Unexplored Baluchistan."

give a park-like appearance to the scene, through which meanders the water, strewn with rush-clad islets. But Sir Thomas Holdich<sup>1</sup> writes: "The fact is that Makran is a country about which a man may write much as he pleases and never stray far from the truth." And he gives another aspect of the country in a passage that makes the landscape "leap to the eye" when he says: "The mountain scenery . . . is not exhilarating, a dead monotony of laminated clay backbones, serrated like that of a whale's vertebræ, sticking out from the smoother outlines of mud ridges which slope down on either hand to where a little edging of sticky salt betokens that there is a drainage line when there is water to trickle along it; and a little faded decoration of neutral-tinted tamarisk shadowing the yellow stalks of last year's forgotten grass along its banks. . . ."

In marching through this land the traveller will be thankful that his horses are shod *à la Persane*, for an English shoe could not adequately protect the hoof on the stony plains thickly strewn with every kind of sharp-cornered pebble and boulder.

There are not many horses in Baluchistan, it being looked upon as a sign of wealth for a man to possess one; therefore "camelry" takes the place here of the cavalry of Persia. This picturesque-looking force is composed of wild-looking Baluchis who ride in pairs on running camels, and are armed with antique *jezails* (Persian rifles) and long, curving knives, and carry leather, brass-embossed shields.

As the party makes its way southward the heat grows greater, and soon the daily march begins at 3 a.m., all getting into camp about 9 a.m., and the traveller trying

<sup>1</sup> "The Indian Borderland." (Perso-Baluch Boundary.)

to make up for his short night's rest by a midday siesta. This is usually difficult, as the tent, unless pitched in the shade of palm-trees, is unbearably stuffy; the flies buzz without intermission, trying to find their way through the mosquito net with which his head and shoulders are enveloped, and there are almost daily sand-storms. These *shaitans* (devils), as the Persians call them, often blow down the tents, insecurely pegged in the loose soil, until experience teaches the party to put boxes on the guy-ropes: they are also irritating because they cover everything with a layer of dust, filling the Sahib's hair, eyes, and ink-pot, not to speak of his food, with grit.

If he is interested in the past history of the country, the traveller will be disappointed when he reaches Bampur, the old capital of the province, to see nothing save a mud-built fortress, situated on what is apparently an artificial mound; and he will soon leave its squalid palm-leaf huts and push on to Fahraj, the present capital, rich in palm-groves and streams of delicious water. Here he will look for traces of Alexander the Great's army; but the inhabitants cannot produce any coins or pottery, though the sight of great mounds of *débris* that might reveal the secrets of the past is tantalising. He will be told that further east, at Jalk and Ladgusht, are the mud-built mausoleums of the Kaianian Maliks, as the natives call them, who ruled over the country until conquered by Nadir Shah; and every here and there he will notice how carefully the now utterly barren hillsides are terraced, testifying to a considerable cultivation in past centuries. But with the heat over 97° in his tent, with the grumbles of his Persian servants in his ears, and the mute suffering of his horses ever before

his eyes, he can only think of the best way to the coast ; and decides to negotiate the mountain passes and dry river-beds between Fahraj and Gwadur, a route that Baluchis look upon as constituting an excellent road for these parts.

Since he left Tehran several weeks ago, the Englishman has had an abundant and varied experience of what travel in Iran means ; but he has not yet grasped the danger of camping in the dry bed of a watercourse, not knowing that heavy rain, falling perhaps a hundred miles distant, may send a roaring torrent from the hills that will sweep away everything in its path. Alexander the Great's camp was destroyed in this fashion, and in this very country some three centuries before Christ ; and the Baluchis have a saying that a wise man when crossing the bed of the Mashkel river will never stop to adjust the rope that keeps his sandal of palmetto fibre in its place, so sudden and unexpected is the onslaught of these *seelabs*. The Sahib's last adventure in Baluchistan might have had a disastrous ending. His tents were pitched in the bed of a dry torrent ; the camels and horses browsed on the banks above ; and preparations were in full swing for the evening meal, when, with hardly any warning, a wall of water was seen bearing down upon the encampment. Master and men fled for their lives, and from the bank ruefully watched tents, stores, and personal belongings of all kinds being washed away down the river, that night being a sad and supperless one. However, things might have been far worse. Gwadur was only a couple of marches distant, and as the dispirited caravan followed the course of the stream on the morrow, they recovered various things that had been stranded high and dry by the flood that

carried them away. Here was a box with the remains of the supplies, there the Sahib's saddle, and all rejoiced at the sight of one of the tents caught in a swirling eddy of what was now a good-sized river. Even with these alleviations the two days before the caravan reached the comparative comfort of Gwadar were a time of considerable deprivation; but when the Englishman said goodbye to his servants and camel-men and found himself and his beloved horses on board a British India steamer bound for Karachi, he heaved a sigh of regret that what he considered to be one of the best times of his life was over.

The reader of this chapter may not unnaturally wonder wherein lies the charm of such travel; for the writer has spoken of extremes of heat and cold, of sand-storms and gales, of the occasional lack of food and the frequent presence of bad water, besides various other discomforts. Certainly all these form a part of a journey through Iran; but the true traveller learns to do without much that he has hitherto looked upon as necessary; and he is enjoying such perfect health, is so thoroughly "fit" that he is almost immune to changes of temperature. There is also an exhilarating sense of power in his capacity for surmounting the various obstacles in his path, and if he has been over-civilised all his days, the song of the desert leading him ever forward into undiscovered lands where possibly adventures may await him, has an indescribable enchantment. Again, he is an Englishman among Orientals, and it adds something to his pride of race to see how instinctively Persian and Baluch look to the Sahib in all emergencies; and he feels, as never before, that in a way he himself is upholding, in a very slight degree, the



honour of the British Empire. Half-unconsciously, he knows that his conduct day by day is setting the standard by which his compatriots will be judged, and such a thought is a powerful stimulus to keep a man at his best.

Rudyard Kipling, in one short poem, has summed up the inexplicable fascination of such journeys, and the true-born traveller cannot read "The Feet of the Young Men" without a quickening of the pulses and a thrill of fellow-feeling, for he too knows the compelling force of the Wanderlust. As the haunting refrain sings—

"He must go—go—go away from here !  
On the other side the world he's overdue.  
'Send your road is clear before you when the old  
Spring-fret comes o'er you  
And the Red Gods call for you !"

## CHAPTER X

### THE PERSIAN WOMAN

EUROPEANS travelling in Asia sometimes assert cheerfully that all is well with the Eastern woman, and that she would not change lots with her Western sister if she could, as she is thoroughly contented with things as they are. When, however, we come to look at the facts of the case, we shall find that the picture they compose is by no means one of roseate hue. "Woman is a calamity, but no house ought to be without this evil," is a well-known saying, and sums up the opinion which Persians have of the "fair sex," Saadi reflecting on their intellect by writing, "To consult women brings ruin to a man."

There is seldom any welcome for the Persian baby-girl as she comes into the world, and is deposited in a common cradle, instead of the silken one that would have been her lot had she been a boy. Her nurse goes in fear and trembling to announce the news of her birth to her father, for the irate man may possibly order the luckless woman to "eat sticks," if he has set his heart on having a son, and the baby's mother feels that she may be divorced for her failure in presenting her husband with an heir.

Of course no feast is held in the child's honour, there

are no congratulatory visits from friends, and the little thing grows up practically unnoticed.

If she is one of several, she will play and perhaps do lessons with her brothers until about the age of eight, when her so-called education will stop. It is a rare thing in Persia to find a woman who can read and write, there being no such thing as a girls' school in the whole country. The child's life will be spent in the *anderoon* or women's apartments, and she will be taught to embroider, to cook and make sweets and sherbets; but if her parents are rich, her time will probably be passed in absolute idleness.

All Persian houses of any size have a *birooni* and an *anderoon*. The *birooni*, or men's rooms, are approached from the street, a high mud wall hiding the house entirely, and once through a strong outer door a passage leads to a courtyard on to which several rooms open and which has a tank in the centre. It would be folly for a man to make any ostentatious display of wealth unless he were in a position that rendered him secure from being "squeezed" by any greedy governor, not to speak of the sovereign himself, therefore the *birooni*, where he sees his friends, and where any one may visit him on business, is always badly furnished.

It is in the *anderoon*, which is invisible from the outer courtyard, though the only approach to it is through this latter, that the master of the house keeps his women, his choicest carpets and silken divans, and the second-rate European lamps and pictures so dear to his heart. Here are sunk beds of flowers round the tank, which perhaps is lined with vivid blue tiles, and possibly, if the space be sufficient, a tree spreads its welcome shade in a corner of the enclosure. So

careful are the Persians to ensure the privacy of their women that men hardly ever walk on the flat roofs of their houses, fearing lest they might be suspected of a wish to peep down into the courtyards of neighbouring *anderoons*.

This seclusion, penetrated by no man save the husband and near relatives, would be like a prison to an Englishwoman ; but a well-to-do Persian lady has no wish for exercise, and cannot take an outing without suitable escort. Her indoor dress gives somewhat of a shock to European eyes. The very short, full trousers not reaching to the knee, are said to be in imitation of the ballet-girls, who charmed Nasr-ed-Din Shah on his journeys to Europe, and the legs and feet are usually bare in summer, though drawers and socks are worn in winter. The loose gauze summer jacket is transparent, and the head appears to be the only part which it is incumbent to cover, the *chargat*, or handkerchief, being worn by day and by night. If a woman, under the influence of some strong emotion, were to tear this off, it would be a sign that she was so overcome by her feelings as to be lost to all sense of propriety for the time being.

Europeans cannot understand why Persians consider a lady's *décolletée* dress immodest, when the costume of their own women leaves so little to the imagination ; but the reason is that no male eyes save those of her husband and relatives, ever rest upon a Persian lady's charms.

At the present time many women don what they call an "English dress" on smart occasions, wearing a fitted bodice and draping a *chadar* from the waist to the feet ; but this fashion is the exception and not the rule.

The Persian woman's outdoor costume is a complete disguise, as she is shrouded from head to foot in a shapeless black *chadar*. Trousers and socks in one, usually of green or purple, are drawn up to her waist, and over her face is a white silk or cotton covering with a small strip of lace-work across the eyes. Her own husband would probably be unable to recognise her did she pass him in the street, and however charming her figure may be, she looks a mere waddling bundle, shuffling along in heelless slippers. Sometimes the face-cloth is of finely woven horsehair, giving its wearer a ghoulish and sinister appearance as she goes on her furtive way; and as a woman's voice may not be heard in public, her absolute silence helps to surround her with an air of mystery, which is increased by the fact that death would be the penalty paid by any man rash enough to lift her veil. In appearance, Persian women are not tall, have small hands and feet, and their rather heavy, oval faces are lit up by fine, dark eyes, but they are usually too stout for English taste. Their white skin has little colour or transparency; but their passion for powder and rouge makes it hard to judge of their complexions fairly, and they use *kohl* to impart a languishing look to their eyes, and to greatly widen the eyebrows, often making these meet across the bridge of the nose. Their abundant black hair is cut in a straight fringe across the forehead, and any scantiness in their locks is compensated for by additions of horsehair. A Persian poet in describing female beauty, winds up his panegyric with the following lines:—

“ Her face is like the full moon  
And she waddles like a goose ” !

The women, in their restricted existence, are thrown entirely upon themselves for amusement, even boys and girls not being allowed to mingle ; therefore they give parties to one another to show off their clothes and jewellery, spending as much money as they can cajole from their husbands on personal adornment.

Their visits to the public baths are occasions for gossip and display. They spend several hours over their bathing, reposing on cushions while their hair is dyed with henna and indigo, and the nails and tips of their fingers and toes with the juice of the former plant ; and then they eat a light lunch in the steamy atmosphere in company with their children, who are bathed free of charge.

A healthier amusement is to drive or ride to some garden outside the town, where the ladies will pass the day in the open air. If they have no carriage they will sit astride upon a horse or donkey, led at a foot's pace by a servant, and they will feel the summer heat considerably, wrapped up so closely in their black *chadars*.

The custom of veiling is supposed to have come about in this wise. In the time of the Prophet the Arab women showed their faces unashamed, and Mohammed being attracted by the beauty of the wife of Zeid, his adopted son, asked that devoted adherent to give her to him in marriage. This action caused considerable scandal among his followers, though the husband himself made no objection at divorcing his wife in favour of his master ; and the Prophet, seeing that he had set an undesirable precedent, commanded that henceforth women should only show their faces to their male relatives. He also dared to say that he



PERSIAN WOMEN IN OUTDOOR DRESS





had received a Divine revelation permitting this union, and this *sura* (number 33) is duly incorporated in the Koran, and at once removed all doubts on the part of the Faithful.

The Persians, however, have a different version of the origin of this custom. They say that one day when Mohammed was seated with Ayesha, the best-loved of his wives, a passing Arab, admiring her good looks, offered her husband a camel in exchange for her, and this annoying experience produced the veiling order in Islam.

Of course the great interest in the life of a Persian girl is her marriage ; but she has practically no choice in the matter, her parents arranging the whole affair. There is a well-known saying : " To do things quickly is of Satan, because God works slowly. Haste is only permissible in three matters which are as follows : to get a husband for your daughter, to bury your dead, and to set food before a guest."

In earlier times girls were married when eleven or twelve years old ; but now a later age is fortunately considered more suitable.

Money enters largely into the question, the parents of a daughter having to give two or three hundred *tomans* to every hundred possessed by the man : they do not appear to take the personal likes and dislikes of the future couple much into consideration, daughters frequently being handed over to men old enough to be their fathers or even grandfathers. If a girl is wedded to a cousin, which is constantly done to keep the property of a family together, she will never have exchanged a word with him since childhood, except in the family circle, and if a marriage is on the

*tapis* it is considered unseeemly for the young lady to visit at the house of the aspirant to her hand. In fact, the couple are not supposed to see one another at all until the formal betrothal before a *mulla* takes place, and on this occasion the *fiancée's* face is so thickly covered with rouge and powder, and her eyes so painted up that it is difficult to get any idea of her natural charms : moreover, she goes through the ceremony in total silence.

A really smart wedding may last for five days and nights, or even for a whole week, the ladies arrayed in beautifully embroidered clothes and wearing all their jewellery. They will sip sherbets, drink syrupy tea, smoke *kalias*, and gossip incessantly ; but the bride-elect is hardly noticed on these occasions, and sits apart in silence with bent head and her *chadar* drawn over her face. The guests will present her with jewels, sugar-loaves ornamented with gold-leaf, or big bowls made of sugar-candy with candy stalactites standing upright in them ; and she herself will have her eyebrows widened with indigo, over which is a line of gold-leaf, while tiny flowers will be painted with indigo on her cheek-bones, chin, and throat. In the midst of the dancing and playing by hired musicians, the cry will be raised, " Behold the bridegroom comes ! " and a great helter-skelter takes place, every one present, bride, ladies, singers, dancers, servants, and slaves hurrying pell-mell into an inner room, screened off by curtains, from behind which they peep at the bridegroom and his particular friends, who come to eat sweetmeats in the *anderoon*. The bridegroom sits in state on a chair, while slaves bring him presents from the bride, serve him and his company with refreshments and water-pipes, and amuse

them by dancing. This visit of ceremony lasts about half an hour, after which the men retire, and the women rush back in a body into the room, which they have been obliged to vacate.

The English lady to whom I am indebted for this account said that on one occasion the little girl-bride who had not been allowed to peer between the curtains, asked her eagerly whether her future husband looked good-tempered, as she had not as yet seen his face!

On the last day of the wedding the bride, who has taken practically no share in all the merry-making, is carried off by her nearest relatives to a private bath, where her face and eyebrows are freshly rouged and painted, and on her return to the guest-room all the women rise, and a copy of the Koran is held over her head for luck and also a mirror to double the length of her life.

Then her *jahaz*, or dowry, which has been laid on large wooden trays for all to see, and which consists of many clothes, cooking utensils, lamps, third-rate European oleographs and vases, is carried off to her new home by porters, and the bride is ready to follow them.

She kisses the hearthstone of her old home, and carries bread, salt, and a piece of gold with her for luck, and then, closely veiled, is lifted on to a large donkey gaily adorned with many-coloured woollen tassels and cowrie shells. A couple of slaves, who form part of her dowry, accompany her on small donkeys, and a great crowd of friends go with her to the house where her husband awaits her.

The Persians have a saying, "The God of women is a man, therefore all women must obey men." This they

certainly put into practice, looking upon their wives as inferior beings born to submit to their rule, a husband having the right, if he so chooses, of forbidding his wife to visit her own parents. A bride usually passes from the paternal yoke to the probably heavier one of the husband and mother-in-law combined, Persians living in patriarchal fashion—a custom productive of many quarrels.

There is seldom any real friendship or intimacy between the wedded couple, and often the husband will pass all his days in the *birooni*, where his wife may not enter, and will have his meals served to him there, his womenkind eating what he may leave.

Mohammed says in the Koran that God, having given men dominion over women, husbands may punish their wives if the latter are disobedient. As a result of this, wife-beating is not uncommon; a hen-pecked husband is a *rara avis*; and unfaithful wives are put to death, probably by being forced to take poison, no inconvenient questions being asked about their sudden decease. The Christian ideal of marriage is not understood, and indeed there is little sanctity in a tie that can be destroyed so easily by divorce, and where the husband is allowed four legal wives, and as many irregular connections as he pleases, including the household slaves.

A Persian may divorce his wife for no other cause than his own caprice; but in such a case is supposed to give back the dowry that he received with her. If, however, the wife asks for the divorce, although she may be in the right, she will probably forfeit all she possesses; and cases are by no means uncommon where a husband, tired of his wife, but determined not to

refund her dowry, ill-treats her in order to force her to sue for a divorce. It can easily be understood that, owing to the seclusion in which the women live, it is hard for them to get justice if they have no powerful relations to help them. If a man has uttered the formula of divorce in a fit of anger, and wishes to have his wife back, she must first be married to and divorced by another man before he is able to do so.

A wife is above all things anxious to become the mother of a son, as unless Allah grants her this she will almost certainly be divorced, or a rival will be introduced, and she will probably lose the affection of her husband, and be held in small esteem by his family and her own friends. In the golden-domed Mosque of Kum dedicated to the sainted Fatima, in the meanest mud building supposed to be haunted by the *Peri-banon*, or Queen of Fairies, or beside some tree hung with fluttering rags, the poor women of Persia lavish prayers and offerings to unseen powers in the hope of becoming mothers of sons.

A husband often neglects his wife when she is old; but fortunately her children are usually attached to her, there being much filial piety in Persia. When she feels that she is nearing her latter end, the thought of going on a pilgrimage often comes into her mind, because the heaven accorded to women by the Prophet cannot be attained by them with the same ease as apparently the men can enter into their Paradise—in fact tradition states that when Mohammed was permitted a glimpse into hell, he informed his followers that women were in an enormous majority in that fiery realm! When we read that the Infernal Regions are haunted by lions and vipers, the former armed with seven thousand teeth and

the latter with seven thousand poison fangs, which incessantly torture the evil, who are lapped in seas of fire, and are for ever in the company of malignant devils, it can be understood that an imaginative woman will make heroic efforts to escape such a doom! She will sell or raise money on her valuables, and persuade her husband to let her go to Mecca, Kerbela, or Meshed, in order to gain the coveted titles of *Hajî*, *Kerbelaî*, or *Meshedî*.

Supposing that the latter is chosen, the journey to the famous shrine of Imam Reza, being probably the easiest and cheapest, the Persian lady has no light task before her. If she cannot afford the swaying *takht-i-ravan*, or litter drawn by two mules, she must sit cramped up in a *kajaveh*, or pannier, strapped on to one side of a mule, in which she will be jolted for hour after hour. However hot the weather may be, she must keep her face hidden by her black *chadar* and white *rou-band*; and when she arrives at her night's destination, probably half-dead with fatigue, her resting-place is usually in the highly uncomfortable and dirty caravanserai. Her room may be a recess without door or window, and although her servants will sweep it out and lay a cotton carpet on the floor, and hang another across the opening, she will in all probability have a restless night, disturbed by the noise of the animals and the conversation of their masters.

Women frequently die on the road during these pilgrimages; but if a lady arrives in safety at her goal, she will probably settle down for several months, and pay daily visits to the Shrine to which she presents offerings of gold and jewellery. She will be met as she

enters the sacred precincts by one of a group of *seyids* (descendants of the Prophet), after whom she will repeat the Arabic formulas of devotion, and she will hire a *mulla* to recite a portion of the Koran to her at each visit. If she attends prayer in the mosque she will sit in a screened-off part where she is invisible to the men-worshippers, and can get but scanty glimpses of the proceedings; but probably she will find here friends from her native city, with whom she will have much conversation.

As her husband has practically managed the house, paying the servants and engaging or dismissing them, and as her children are either grown up or in the charge of some attached slave, there is no need for her to hurry back to her duties, for she is not greatly missed in her home.

If she dies at Meshed she will be interred in the precincts of the Shrine, with the assurance of attaining to Paradise; and perhaps if she returns in safety to her family and passes away at home, her corpse may be sent in charge of a muleteer to be buried in some sacred spot, thus forming part of that ghastly caravan of coffins often met by travellers near Kum or Meshed.

When a woman dies there is a terrible service enacted at her house after she is buried. All the ladies of the family and their friends assemble in a large room, and hired mourners repeat in a wailing monotone, "Weep for the sister who is lost—lost—lost!" At each "lost" they strike their naked chests with the right hand and soon stir up their audience, who repeat the refrain after them and beat their breasts in unison. "Weep for the sister wandering in space—weep—weep—weep!" So the wail goes on; and the

relatives sob, tear their hair and clothes, and even knock their heads against the wall in a frenzy of grief. Then suddenly there will be a pause, and cups of tea and *kahians* will be handed round to refresh the mourners before they give vent to new outbursts of emotion.

The life of a Persian woman, taken as a whole, cannot be considered a happy one, and the victims of Islam recognise that their fate is hard when they are brought into contact with European women. The seclusion of their lives, with so little outside interest, encourages hysteria and all sorts of nervous complaints; and though the townswoman despises her unveiled peasant-sister, yet the latter has the best of it, hard though she may have to work for her livelihood.

Certainly the yoke of Mohammedanism presses heavily on the Persian woman, and, through her, on the entire race, for how can a nation make real progress if the mothers of its men are kept in bondage and ignorance? In the words of Sir William Muir,<sup>1</sup> "The condition fixed by Mahomet for woman is that of a dependent inferior creature, destined only for the service of her lord, liable to be cast off without the assignment of any reason and without the notice of a single hour. While the husband possesses the power of divorce, absolute, immediate, unquestioned, no privilege of a corresponding nature has been reserved for the wife. She hangs on, however unwilling, neglected, or superseded, the perpetual slave of her lord—if such be his will."

When the writer gained some acquaintances among Persian women, she found that a latent discontent with

<sup>1</sup> "Life of Mahomet."





GABR WOMAN AND CHILD



their restricted surroundings was fanned into life by the tremendous contrast between the unfettered existence of an Englishwoman and their own. It was pathetic to be urged never to marry a Persian! "Oh *Khanum*" (Lady), a woman would say, "my husband makes me 'eat' much sorrow. If his *pilau* or sherbet is not to his liking he may beat me, and I know that if I had an illness that made me ugly he would divorce me on the spot. And when I get old he will treat me worse than a servant."

All this the writer was forced to believe when a Persian boasted to her that his wife trembled in his presence to such an extent that she could not swallow a mouthful of food!

Certainly the saying that "no good comes from a house where the hens crow like cocks," can apply but seldom to the women of Iran!

## CHAPTER XI

### COUNTRY LIFE

THE Persian peasant, usually clad in blue cotton shirt and trousers with a thick felt sleeveless overcoat, and a felt skull-cap, is a hardy, simple fellow as he trudges along in his cotton *givas*, a comfortable footgear much resembling bathing-shoes.

Beside him walks his diminutive ass, often sadly overloaded with bricks, stones from the quarries, manure, or firewood, but, as a rule, not ill-treated by its master. If the aforesaid master is a villager, he tills the land on a kind of feudal system, the owner of a village providing the ground, the seed, and the tools, and taking half the produce in payment; no money passes between him and the peasants, many of whom have never handled a coin in their lives. When it is a bad year and the harvest fails or locusts devour the crops, the landowner feeds his tenants and waits for his share of the profits until times are better. The food of a labourer is simple enough, consisting principally of bread, cheese, and fruit, cucumbers and lettuces, with an occasional bowl of curds or a little meat at rare intervals. In Baluchistan and the Gulf district dates are the staple diet, and as he cannot afford firewood, the villager burns dried manure and camel-thorn. The peasants are all

very poor, and besides a share of the produce, they often have to give the owner of the land so many *kaveh* of firewood a year, and perform various other services for him. About half the Shah's revenue is derived from taxes in the form of cash or kind imposed on all districts, towns, and villages, and the greatest burden falls on the peasantry, the poorest class. Though the tax-assessors change the sums demanded from time to time, yet of late years they have always increased them.

As there are no big manufactories in the country, and but little trade, farming is the chief occupation; and the land well repays cultivation, the most unpromising-looking soil bringing forth abundantly if irrigated.

The peasants are not serfs, and are free to leave one village and settle in another; yet there is no incentive for them to overwork themselves, because the landlord would be the chief gainer by their efforts, and in all probability the government tax on his property would be raised were more land taken into cultivation. The writer remembers one spring seeing a group of half-starved peasants working languidly during the Fast of Ramazan, when their "betters" were all abed sleeping off the effects of a night of feasting. The men were offered the remains of the English lunch, and their head-man stuffed the *pilau* into the bosom of his shirt, explaining that no one might touch a grain of the rice until the sun had set. He added that he trusted Allah would be merciful to them, and not send a plague of locusts that year, as these insects had devoured all their crops of barley during the previous autumn, and the peasants had been forced to live on

half-rations throughout the winter, and must continue to do so until the grain was ripe. Somehow there was a hopelessness about all of them, a weariness and lack of purpose and vitality that it was sad to observe.

The implements used by the villagers are of primitive description, the V-shaped spade doing about half the work of an English one, and the plough being merely a harrow dragged by a yoke of oxen. Sometimes as many as six yoke turn up the same small patch of ground, the oxen apparently walking exactly behind one another, though in reality keeping slightly to the right or left : in this case the animals are the property of a contractor who hires them out to plough all the land in the district. It is curious to notice men sowing on the *unploughed* land, the idea being that the process of ploughing will cover the seed, but to European eyes it seems reversing the natural order of things.

Though there are many rain-fed crops grown in northern Persia, yet as a rule the soil is irrigated. To facilitate the process all the ground is divided into squares surrounded by low earth-banks, through which the water is let in to cover the patches of cultivation in turn, and to soak them thoroughly. In order to prevent the caking of the soil, fine sand is thrown over it, and the melon-beds in particular have a coating of silver sand about half an inch in depth. The refuse of the towns is used as manure after it has been left to dry for a considerable time, and Persians are indefatigable in carrying off the mud-brick *débris* of all ruins for this purpose. The chief crop of the country is barley, which is the food of horses and mules, as oats are not

grown, and it is also the food of the poor, wheaten bread being only for the well-to-do.

The country barley bread is often made in thick flaps, called *sanjak*, the name implying that it is baked on hot stones, which are placed at the bottom of the oven, and when fresh and crisp it is excellent. The ordinary oven *nan* (bread) is made in the shape of thin cakes about a couple of feet long and a foot wide, the baker sticking these cakes with a deft movement of his hand against the sides of the heated oven. Directly they are baked sufficiently they drop off and are hung on a big nail or suspended over a horizontal stick in readiness for purchasers. Persians eat quantities of hot bread and carry off the long cakes from the bakery hanging over their arms. Owing to the primitive methods of grinding the flour there is often a good deal of grit and even an occasional pebble in this bread.

The rice for the *pilau*, the national dish of Persia, comes from the rainy districts round the Caspian, and tobacco is cultivated here and in the south, the best coming from Shiraz. Cotton is grown in many places, and dates are an important product of low-lying parts of Persia, usually situated near the Persian Gulf, and constitute the wealth of its inhabitants, a man being rich in proportion to the number of date-palms that he owns. Persians say that the tree was introduced by the Arabs when they conquered the country, the hardy warriors bringing this portable food with them from Arabia and casting the stones along their line of march.

The opium poppy is largely grown on the Persian Plateau and is a real misfortune to the inhabitants, both men and women becoming addicted to the drug and even giving it to their babies if sleepless and fretful.

Professor E. G. Browne<sup>1</sup> translates the Persian opium-smoker's epigram in these words:—

“Sir Opium of ours for every ill is a remedy swift and sure,  
But he, if you bear for a while his yoke, is an ill which knows  
no cure.”

Opium is a very precarious crop, as may easily be understood when the manner of collecting it is explained. When the flower petals are falling the poppy-heads are gashed with a kind of tiny iron comb, and the juice that slowly oozes out is scraped off the next morning, this process being repeated twice. If, however, rain happens to fall when the opium is collecting the juice will all be washed away from the seed-vessels and of course lost. On any other occasion a rainy day is regarded with unfeigned delight in Persia, and indeed the European who has been some time in the country realises what a godsend a heavy downfall is to the parched and cracked soil and what good it will do to the crops that depend, as a rule, entirely on irrigation.

Though the Persian rejoices in the moist air and the scent of the wet earth, yet it is hardly credible to what a state the roads are reduced after a day or two of wet weather. Riding is dangerous save at a foot's pace, the streets of every town and village run liquid mud, ankle deep in places, and the roofs of the mud-built houses have an inconvenient habit of falling in. However, the sun soon shines forth again and dries up the country. A hailstorm is a very different matter. The writer saw such a storm in the north of Persia during April when the trees were a mass of blossom. Stones as large as cherries rattled down with a great noise, breaking the

<sup>1</sup> “A Year amongst the Persians.”





THRESHING



glass in all exposed windows, stripping the bloom from the branches, tearing the young shoots off the rose bushes, and ploughing up the sunk beds in the garden. And when the storm was over there was much tribulation in the district, for the orchards, on which many depend for a livelihood, were ruined for that year.

As there is practically no grass in Persia, clover is much used for fodder, several crops being produced yearly from irrigated ground, and the substitute for hay is *kah*, or straw. After the crops of wheat and barley have been cut with a sickle they are threshed by the feet of animals that sometimes drag a kind of cart on rollers. Or this process of threshing may be carried on by a bevy of horses, mules, and donkeys, all harnessed together and forced to go round and round a huge heap of corn, a little of which is tossed beneath their hoofs at a time, thus separating the grain from the ear and breaking up the straw. If possible, a breezy day is chosen for this operation, reminding the onlooker of the verse in the Psalms in which the evil are to be "scattered as chaff before the wind." All mud bricks have an admixture of *kah*, and Dr. Wills<sup>1</sup> points out that this was what the Jews demanded when they asked the Egyptians for straw to make their bricks.

A good deal of silk is produced in Persia, the best silkworms' eggs coming from Turkey, and these the landlord gives to his peasants, receiving a proportion of the silk in return. The women often carry the eggs next their skin in order to hatch them, and have to keep the caterpillars in a clean room and guard them from all noise, the buzzing of wasps and flies being supposed to be injurious to them when they have begun to work.

<sup>1</sup> "Persia as it is."

The grape is cultivated throughout the country, the vines in the north being planted in deep trenches and the stems drawn up through the earth of the lofty banks between the ditches in order to keep the plants warm through the intense cold of the winter when there may be several degrees of frost at night. Wine is made in many places, but the white wines of Hamadan and Shiraz rank the highest, and it is interesting to note that natives of this latter city came to Spain in the Middle Ages to teach the Moors the art of wine-making: the Spanish town Xeres, where they settled, and our word "sherry," for the wine produced there are both corruptions of Shiraz. Saadi and Hafiz have sung the praises of this wine, which travels all over Persia in great glass flasks merely packed in straw; and from the refuse of the grapes, arrack, the favourite spirit of the country, is concocted.

A Persian village is picturesque in the distance, being surrounded by a high mud wall, often castellated, and entered by a gateway, recalling the days, not so long ago, when Iran was never safe from raiders and every hamlet was practically a fortress.

Sir Mortimer Durand<sup>1</sup> gives a word-picture that vividly describes such a spot: "Beyond the village a little fan of cultivation pushed up into a fold in the stony flank of the mountain. A cold stream, fed from the hills above, came foaming down through a channel of rough boulders, and on both sides of it grew apple orchards and poplars and plane-trees." To see such a place at its best it should be approached at sunset, when the symbol of the deity, saluted at dawn and eve by the Zoroastrians, is sinking in a golden glory behind

<sup>1</sup> "Nadir Shah."

the western ranges and flushing the eastern hills, the barren plain and the mud walls and buildings of the village, with a magical rosy light. The flocks are returning to their homes, sheep and goats mixed, black, white, brown and particoloured, the patter of their little hoofs making a curious rustling noise on the dry sand. One old man and a handsome, shaggy, white dog will shepherd the animals numbering some hundreds, the man perhaps carrying in his arms a newly born lamb, while others are in the bag slung on his back.

It is a peaceful scene of pastoral life ; and as the sun drops below the horizon, the *muezzin*, standing on the *minar* of the tiny mud-built mosque, sends out the call to prayer across the stillness of the plain, and uncouth figures in blue cotton and felt garments prostrate themselves in devotion, their faces turned towards holy Mecca.

And the traveller will feel that this is Persia, the great expanse of desert, the mountain ranges shutting in his view on either side ; not a tree and hardly a sign to be seen of vegetation, and perhaps the only living creature a vulture slowly wheeling in the sky. Such is the setting of the insignificant group of mud-domed hovels, all huddled together within their encircling mud wall, and surrounded by small patches of cultivation which have to be laboriously irrigated by the mountain stream. Inside the village it will be rare for the unplastered mud rooms to have windows, all light and air reaching them through the rickety and warped wooden doors, and if the roofs are not of mud, they will be made of beams, the interstices of which are stuffed with straw.

The Persians are not a cleanly nation, and the

European seeking village hospitality will probably find the rooms infested with vermin, and as he sinks to an uneasy rest he will be disturbed by the incessant angry barking of the peasants' dogs, as they answer the jackals that are howling round the walls in packs, seeking their food.

The village women, thin and weather-beaten, are chosen by their husbands for their strength and for their skill as weavers and cheesemakers. They work hard at their household tasks such as making the bread, the clothes for their families, drawing the water, and milking the flocks; and are unveiled, though they occasionally put the checked cotton sheet that envelops them across their faces if a foreigner approaches. Most of them look prematurely aged, owing to the early marriages in vogue, and sometimes resemble the grandmothers rather than the mothers of the often rosy-cheeked boys and girls who cling shyly to their cotton skirts. The children are clad in cotton jackets which hang open, and the writer has seen them in the depth of winter with no more adequate protection than this against the intense cold, and has not wondered at the terrible infant mortality in Iran. To all remonstrance the peasants shrug their shoulders and say, "*Dastur ast*" (It is the custom) for children to be so lightly clad; and they add that if Allah intends them to die it will be of no use to struggle against His decree—" *Kismet!* "

Nearly every village, however small, has its school, where the urchins are taught to read the Koran and to write. There is no government subsidy, therefore the boys are often entrusted to a teacher totally unfitted for his task, who sometimes treats his charges with

cruelty. The parents will pay the schoolmaster in kind for his services, and he often considers the following maxims of Saadi as the pivot of his method: "The severity of a teacher is better than the fondness of a father," or, "He whom thou hast not chastised as a child, will not prosper when he grows to manhood."

Perhaps the people who enjoy life most in Persia are the nomads, or *Iliats*. All over the country these wandering tribes travel in the spring from the mud-built villages where they have passed the winter, up into the hills, in search of pasturage for their flocks. They pitch an encampment of black goats'-hair tents on some grassy upland during the summer, and devote themselves to the care of their herds, the women employing their spare time in the weaving of carpets and in cheese making. These nomad women are free, frank, vigorous creatures, accosting the traveller without shyness, and offering him refreshment. In the north they wear crimson and blue garments and are adorned with many chains and heavy silver clasps set with cornelians.<sup>9</sup> But whether they display jewellery, or are poorly clad in short, blue cotton skirts showing their bare ankles and feet, their heads being tied up in white cloths, the type from the north to the south is the same. They are on an equality with the men, whatever their religion may affirm, and are naturally far healthier and happier than their cloistered and often discontented sisters in the towns, who despise them heartily on account of their unveiled faces.

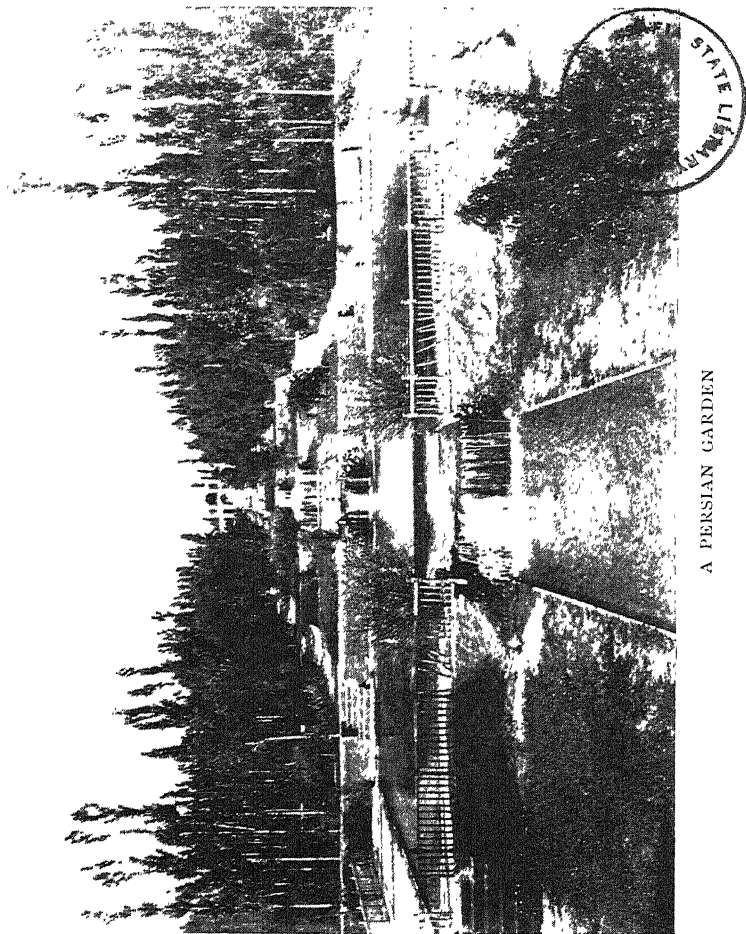
Any account of country life would be incomplete without the mention of gardens. Every well-to-do Persian takes an intense interest in some stretch of ground which he lays out and displays to visitors with pride.

It is badly kept according to Western ideas, and the writer who was shown many such gardens felt at first some surprise at their lack of beauty. As a rule they are square, surrounded by high mud walls destitute of any creeper, and through them run narrow channels of water, beside which are planted rows of stiff poplars, the favourite tree of Persian gardeners. In place of the beautiful English lawns are often patches of clover which produce several crops annually, and instead of the wealth of bloom which is the glory of the British garden, there will be a few sunk beds in which some balsams, petunias, asters, marigolds, and wallflowers make a poor show, and are usually all withered up during the fierce heats of summer, everything else being allowed to run wild. Some gardens are really orchards, and in the spring the exquisite bloom of the fruit-trees is a beautiful sight; while other gardens, that remind the visitor of those in Italy, have pergolas of vines, avenues of cypresses, groups of pomegranates, their brilliant flowers shining like flames amid the dark foliage, and masses of rose-bushes; and in such charming retreats the *bulbuls* sing all day long.

Rose-water (*gulabi*), which is used to cleanse the greasy right hand after eating, to flavour sherbets and sweatmeats, and by the well-to-do for their ablutions, is much made. The rose chiefly found in Persia is the little loose-petalled pink one like the monthly rose, and its petals are pressed down into a great iron pot, water poured over them, and burning charcoal piled up round them. A tube is then inserted into the mass of rose-heads, and passing through a jar of cold water it drips a warm, sickly-scented liquid into a bottle placed to receive it.



A PERSIAN GARDEN





In every Persian garden there is a *takht*, or mud platform, in the shade of the trees, and if possible near the running water of the *kanat*. Here the owner will pass many hours, reposing on carpets, smoking his water-pipe, partaking of innumerable cups of tea, and surrounded by his friends with whom he will cap quotations from his favourite poets or enter upon endless religious discussions.

To appreciate a Persian garden it is necessary to contrast it with the howling desert that is usually outside its walls. A barren expanse without a tree, a shrub, or even a blade of grass, and not a drop of water, must be crossed under the burning heat of the summer sun, before the traveller hot, dusty, and thirsty, enters a rickety wooden door and finds a paradise of shade, greenery, and running water in blessed contrast to the glare he has just left. A pleasant trait about Persians is that all are free to come and picnic in these retreats, the owner apparently being flattered when parties of merrymakers invade his solitude—a characteristic in direct opposition to British exclusiveness. Very often there will be a fantastic little pavilion always called *kolah Feringhi*, or “European hat,” from an entirely imaginary resemblance to that article, and here Persians love to take their midday siestas or to sup on hot nights.

The garden will sometimes have a house in which the owner and his family will spend the summer months, and these buildings are often very pretty, usually having a verandah supported by poplar columns ornamented with elaborate plaster-work, and sometimes a most imposing *gatch* (stucco) façade, which will be mirrored in the large water-tank in front of the

building. If the owner is addicted to sport, the horns of the ibex, moufflon, and gazelle will probably decorate this building, as they are credited with the power of keeping off the evil eye.

A *naringistan*, or orangery, is another feature of such a garden, the owner presenting a fruit from his treasured trees to the visitor as if it were a beautiful bouquet of flowers; and the writer has often been offered a dried-up little orange by some gentleman or lady who had come to afternoon tea with her, the gift being made with almost ludicrous *empressement*.

As the very existence of a garden depends on its water supply, a rich man will pay to have the precious liquid always running through his domain, the extremely scanty rainfall hardly being taken into account for purposes of cultivation.

Every few days the water, which is a real luxury in Persia from its cost, is let in upon the sunk flower-beds, the patches of lucerne and crops of vegetables, and allowed to stay for several hours in order to soak into the soil thoroughly. It is heartrending to be forced to put up with an inadequate water supply, and if the water runs through such a garden on its way to others, and perhaps has only been bought for one day in the week, it would be a punishable offence to use it for the plants, though the occupants might take what they pleased for drinking and washing purposes.

This picturesque passage from a paper read by Sir George Birdwood<sup>\*</sup> describes the Persian fondness for flowers far better than any words of mine can do: "When a pure Iranian sauntered through (the Victoria

<sup>\*</sup> "The Antiquity of Oriental Carpets," read before the Society of Arts, November 6, 1908.

Gardens in Bombay) . . . he would stand awhile and meditate over every flower in his path, and always as in vision ; and when at last the vision was fulfilled, and the ideal flower found, he would spread his mat, or carpet, before it, and sit before it to the going down of the sun, when he would arise and pray before it, and then refold his mat or carpet and go home : and the next night, and night after night, until that bright particular flower faded away, he would return to it, bringing his friends with him in ever-increasing numbers, and sit and sing and play the guitar or lute before it—and anon they all would arise together and pray before it ; and after prayers, still sit on, sipping sherbet and talking the most hilarious and shocking scandal, late into the moonlight : and so again and again, evening after evening, until the beauteous flower died, satiated of worship. Some evenings, by way of a grand finale, the whole company would suddenly rise up, as one man, before the bright, consummate flower, and serenade it with an ode from Hafiz, and, rolling up their carpets, depart into the silences of the outer night.”

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PERSIAN GULF AND THE KARUN RIVER

NAVAL officers often say that the Persian Gulf is the hottest sea in the world, and the writer, who has visited it both in June and in September, heartily endorses their verdict, and has an abiding sympathy for those of her countrymen whose avocations force them to spend the best part of their lives on those torrid waters.

For over a century England has policed the Gulf, and it is to her exertions that the once-flourishing slave trade and the depredations of pirates are practically a thing of the past. It is a curious fact that the Persians appear to be entirely devoid of any naval capacity, and there were probably no Persian sailors present at the Battle of Salamis, Xerxes supplying his navy from the maritime nations under his sway. Iranians have a dread of the sea, and the countless craft to be seen off their southern coasts are all manned by Arabs, as well as the *Persepolis*, the white-painted vessel, armed with four Krupp guns, that is supposed to patrol the Gulf. This steamer is usually spoken of as the "Persian Navy," and it has no fellows, unless the Shah's steam-yacht on the Caspian, and his little steamer the *Susa*, that is confined to the upper reaches of the Karun, are allowed to count as forming part of the

naval strength of the "Land of the Lion and the Sun."

The southern shores of Persia are washed by the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, as well as the Persian Gulf; and it may be of interest to describe how the traveller bound for the Karun river proceeds when he has left Karachi in a British India steamer. These vessels are comfortable enough, but the writer's journeys were made at a time when no fruit and vegetables were to be had. A diet of chops and steaks with the wet bulb of the thermometer at 92° is not the most appetising of fare; and when it is added that everything drinkable is tepid owing to the lack of ice, and that cockroaches abound, it must be allowed that the Gulf in summer is not exactly the place to choose for a pleasure trip. An officer who has travelled in many different parts of the world alleges that a dessert-spoon will cover any ordinary cockroach, but that the steamy atmosphere of this sea produces a breed so large that a table-spoon is needed to hide their formidable dimensions! The steamers now do the journey in five days, but they used to proceed slowly, stopping during the day to take in cargo from the different ports off which they lay, and going on at night. Sometimes they carry a great crowd of deck-passengers, who, if pilgrims on their way to Kerbela, are often very fanatical, fights occasionally arising between Shiah and Sunni, in which the plucky British India officers have sometimes to take their lives into their hands when separating the angry opponents. These latter are often "slippery" customers, and occasionally a man will resort to almost any shift to avoid paying the passage-money which is collected when the steamer has started. Of course the defaulter is put

ashore at the first stopping-place ; but as time is of no object in the East, he will board the next steamer, play the same game, and be landed a stage further on his journey !

After leaving Karachi, perhaps in the teeth of the *monsoon*, Gwadur and Jask are reached, both villages being posts of the Indo-European telegraph line : Jask was the first settlement made in Persia by the British East India Company.

From here the steamer crosses to Maskat, the capital of Oman on the Arabian coast, the long line of dreary-looking hills, destitute of even a blade of grass, that rise up sheer from the sea, being suddenly broken, and forming an almost landlocked little harbour, one of the most picturesque imaginable. Great cliffs tower on either side, leaving a narrow strip of land on the sea-front, from behind which, about a mile inland, is the formidable mountain barrier making an impressive background to the huddle of native houses crowded together as closely as possible. Among these the Sultan's white palace and the British Residency stand out conspicuously ; and two mouldering Portuguese forts, built on spurs of the mountains, dominate the port, reminding the visitor that Maskat was in the possession of Portugal from 1506 to 1650.

On the east side of the little bay is a great mass of rock, separated by a narrow channel from the mainland, and this is used as a playground for the British sailor, who is not allowed to land in the port itself in case of friction with the dense and fanatical population. This islet, which has not a trace of vegetation, and seems as if it would afford but a scanty foothold to goats, is adorned with the names of the different vessels that



have been anchored off the town, prominent among them being H.M.S. *Sphinx* in huge, white letters.

The climate in summer is almost unbearable for Europeans, because the frowning rock walls absorb the intense heat during the day and give it out at night, making sleep almost an impossibility when the blessed *shamal*, or north wind, is not blowing.

The British entered into a treaty with Maskat in 1800, as they wished to guard against the designs of Napoleon, who is said to have contemplated the conquest of India from this base, and since that date there has always been an English political agent at the Court of the Sultan.

Before leaving Maskat it may be of interest to glance at the past history of the Gulf, believed by some authorities to be the cradle of the human race. It is supposed that the seafaring Phœnicians took their rise here, and Erythras, the Red King, who perhaps is buried in the great necropolis at Bahrein, has given his name to this inland sea.

Later on, Alexander's admiral, Nearchus, who mentions that he saw the tomb of King Erythras at Kishm, piloted the Macedonian fleet along these seas from the Indus to the Tigris. Major Sykes<sup>1</sup> points out that Alexander and his army kept in touch with the fleet in order to provision this latter, until the Malan range, coming right down to the water's edge, forced the soldiers to march inland and strike across the modern Makran, where they endured the horrors of thirst while marching in heat of about 100° through loose sand.

After this we hear little of the Gulf for many centuries, but when the Arabs had established the Khalifate at

<sup>1</sup> "Journal of Society of Arts," June 4, 1897.

Baghdad, that city and Balsora (the modern Busreh) sent forth hardy sailors down the Gulf to bring back jewels, stuffs, and spices from India. At the present day the clumsy native *mehalas* and *buggelows* to be seen at Busreh are practically the same type of vessel in which Sinbad made his marvellous voyages.

The island of Hormuz was the great centre of this trade in the Middle Ages, holding much the same position as Venice did in the West, both being the distributing houses of their continents.

In the first years of the sixteenth century the Portuguese, under Albuquerque, made their appearance in the Gulf. They captured Hormuz, fortified various of the ports, and allowed no other nation to trade freely in the Gulf for nearly a century and a half. The first Englishman who visited this sea was Ralph Fitch, who, with three companions, sailed up it in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, but the Portuguese, jealous of this intrusion into their special preserve, captured the Englishmen and imprisoned them in Goa.

In the seventeenth century Shah Abbas entered into a treaty with the East India Company, promising them certain concessions and half the spoil if they would assist him in turning the Portuguese out of their strongholds. This was done, naval fights taking place at Jask, Hormuz, and Maskat, in which the Portuguese were worsted, and at last, after several years, expelled from the Gulf. Shah Abbas having got what he wanted, was by no means willing to fulfil his side of the bargain, and it seemed as if the English had gained nothing save a factory at Gombrun (now called Bandar Abbas, in honour of the Persian sovereign); the Dutch and French also starting trading centres at the same torrid spot.

British prestige, however, increased from this time, and during the last century our nation gradually took over the work of policing the Gulf. The English suppressed the formidable pirate bands; stopped the constant warfare among the different chiefs; the uncontrolled trade in arms; and, quite unaided, put down the once-flourishing traffic in slaves. Added to this, British officers have done all the survey work of the Gulf, and made charts of a sea that requires skilful navigation.

It is no mean thing that the *pax Britannica* has been kept in a region where every man's hand is against his fellow, where life is held in small account and might is right. Over and over again the British have protected the *sheikhs* of such places as Bahrein and Koweit from Persian aggression, and but for the presence of our gunboats, the busy traffic in dates, dried fish, and so on, not to speak of the valuable pearl-fisheries, would be practically impossible.

Even the British India steamers, which are solely merchantmen, are looked upon with respect by the chieftains of the various tribes who come on board to greet their captains with a *Salaam Aliekum* (Peace be with you). These kingly-looking *sheikhs* wear white robes over which are thrown burnouses of black camel's hair so finely woven as to be semi-transparent, and the *kafiyehs*, or handkerchiefs, on their heads are kept in place by ropes of camel's wool entwined with gold. With jet-black hair and beards, bronzed skin and piercing eyes, they stride towards the Englishmen with peculiar dignity and shake hands with a gesture that recalls to readers of the life of Mohammed, how at various crises in his career his followers plighted faith

with him by *striking* their hands upon his. The British Resident at Bushire has a position of great authority with these wild Arabs, who have a profound belief in the honour and truth of the English.

Of course it is not meant to be inferred that we have performed this beneficent work entirely from humanitarian motives. We were obliged from self-interest to suppress the pirates, who were injuring our trade, and later on we saw clearly that to allow any rival Power to become predominant in the Gulf would be seriously to weaken our prestige in India ; but we may fairly take some credit for the blood and money that we expended in stamping out slavery.

After this long digression let us continue our journey to the Karun. Taking a north-west course from Maskat we shall steer between the islands of Hormuz (once so famous, though barren, destitute of water, and with a soil impregnated with salt) and Kishm, where for some forty years the English had a military station. Fraser<sup>1</sup> visited the cantonments in the August of 1821, and found a pitiable state of affairs, both officers and men succumbing to fever or scurvy, a great shortage of medicines and supplies of all kinds, and no fish, fruit, or vegetables to be procured, and he draws a contrast between the "white man's burden" in India, and Persia, to the great disadvantage of the latter country.

The steamer then lies off squalid Bandar Abbas, the sea being so shallow that visitors must row some two miles before reaching the town that lies close to the water, and has the distinction of possessing one of the unhealthiest climates on the Gulf. Lingah, the

<sup>1</sup> "Journey into Khorasan."

next halt, is, at a distance, charmingly picturesque, the white buildings of the town embosomed in feathery palms, and the whole scene backed with a delicately tinted pink and grey mountain range. Here Hindoos with marvellous "wild-cat" moustaches may come on board, and opening knotted handkerchiefs will display handfuls of beautiful pearls to the traveller. Next morning the steamer will probably be lying off Bahrein, and flotillas of boats setting out for the pearl reefs look most picturesque as they rock on the vivid blue sea. At a considerable distance from the shore men will be seen wading knee-deep and filling jugs from the fresh springs which are bubbling up beneath the salt water, and so shallow is the sea that boats can only get to within about half a mile of the island. This inconvenience is, however, obviated by the fine Bahrein asses which are cantered out to any boat containing visitors. Their riders then descend and yell out the praises of their respective steeds with great vigour, as the travellers perch themselves on rudimentary saddles, unprovided with stirrups, and having rope halters in lieu of bridles. The town of Bahrein, like all others on the Gulf, is composed in great part of hovels formed from palm-leaf matting, and the Sultan's gimcrack palace is almost the only building, save a mosque, that has any pretensions to architecture. The traveller's donkey, much adorned with henna, will take him at a canter away from the town past the ruins of an old Persian mosque, past date-groves and streams of beautiful water, right into the interior of the island. Here, far as eye can reach, he will see thousands of mounds, the tombs of a bygone people, and will long for science to solve the mystery of the identity of the race that built them.

Sir Edward Durand and Mr. Theodore Bent excavated some of these graves, but found little to aid them in unravelling their well-kept secret, and it is to be hoped that our Archæological Department which has been working there for the last two years may have more success.

Pearls, of course, are the great *specialité* of Bahrein, and the divers are let down from the boats by ropes weighted with large stones that take them straight to the bottom of the transparent sea, through which they can see the oyster-beds. Here they collect all the oysters they can in the few seconds they are able to remain below with ears plugged and nostrils closed; and they take their lives in their hands, for the Gulf swarms with sharks and sword-fish to which several fall a prey every year.

The next stopping-place for the steamer is Bushire, where we have a British Resident. It is the most important port on the Gulf and the most pretentious in appearance, though it is a landing-place rather than a harbour, and owing to the shallowness of the water all large vessels have to lie at a considerable distance off it.

Bushire came into prominence during the Zend dynasty, being the nearest port to Shiraz which then became the capital of Persia. To reach this town from the Gulf it is necessary to cross the most appalling *kotals* or passes, in the high mountain barrier that separates the Persian Plateau from the sea, and rises some thirty miles inland. It seems wonderful to the ordinary traveller that men could ever have ventured to take loaded animals across such terrible staircases, where the track winds along preci-

pices down which a false step would hurl the creatures to destruction. Accidents of this kind, however, seldom happen, though the sure-footed mules that pick their way from point to point unaided pay a heavy toll annually, dying from the exhaustion resulting from their efforts. The horses are almost as clever climbers as are the mules, and a heavily-built Persian gentleman told the writer with evident pride that he had never dismounted from his steed in *descending* these dangerous *kotals*. He was somewhat surprised when he found that his personal bravery had made no impression upon her, but rather his cruelty to his willing horse!

From Bushire the low, date-covered shores close in at the little telegraph post of Fao, where there is a sand-bar caused by the silt brought down by the Shat-el-Arab, the river formed by the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris. This can only be crossed by large vessels at certain times slowly and with care, and the steamer halts at Mohamera, at which point the waters of the Karun river join the Shat-el-Arab before they plunge into the Persian Gulf.

Here the traveller must change into a small steamer, the *Malamir*, and leaving behind him the great groves of palms that supply half the world with dates, he will proceed up a river, on either side of which stretches a sandy desert diversified with a few willows or beds of reeds. He is now in the province of Arabistan, the ancient Elam, and the scenery is far from beautiful, but the hot, dry wind that swirls the clouds of sand into the boat at intervals is in delightful contrast to the moist, damp heat he has just left. Life is worth living again, and he sleeps as he has never done on

the Gulf. Along the river-banks are Arab encampments, made of palm-leaf matting, the inhabitants clad in black goat's-hair garments and their most treasured possessions being beautiful mares as tame and docile as dogs.

On the afternoon of the second day, if the steamer has ploughed through the numerous sand-shoals without running aground on any of them, the traveller arrives at Bander Nasserî and Ahwaz, where, if he wishes to proceed further, he must tranship, owing to the rapids. These villages have grown prosperous of late years owing to the commerce in corn and wool started by Messrs. Lynch and Hotz. The simple Arabs are most honourable traders—a great contrast in this respect to the Persians—and if, as hardly ever happens, a man declines to meet his engagements, the whole tribe will pay what is owing in order to avoid any slur on its reputation. Curiously enough the Arabs insist on growing wheat and barley on the same land, saying that they cannot alter the custom of their forefathers; and their conservatism necessitates the employment of a special machine by the agents to separate the different grains. This whole district could supply an enormous quantity of wheat, as the soil produces splendid crops, though the water supply is limited. But, as usual, the Persian Government takes no steps to develop this source of potential wealth, and the *mullas* do not allow export.

At Ahwaz are still to be seen the remains of the masonry of the dam, built perhaps by Shapur I., whose famous *band* (dam) at Shuster some sixty miles further up the Karun, still irrigates the great plain and provides food for thousands. The rapids at Ahwaz



are caused by a sandstone reef stretching across the river-bed, the water swirling and rushing with great force over the rocks at one point. Some three or four miles from the river this ridge crops up on the desert. In it are hollowed out many caves, making the traveller wonder whether they could perhaps have been inhabited by Nestorian monks in the days when Ahwaz was a Christian town and a great centre of agriculture.

During the hot July weather of the writer's visit to Ahwaz, the thermometer, hung in the coolest room in the house, was always at  $105^{\circ}$  at eight o'clock every morning, and went up as the sun rose into the heavens. Every door and window was shut during the day; for the *shamal*, or north wind, blew like the blast of a furnace round the house, raising the desert dust in clouds. The little party of Europeans were accustomed to rise at 4 a.m. in order to get a ride before seven o'clock, at which hour the sun became too powerful to remain safely out of doors. All the world was astir very early. Men in long, white robes, black burnouses, and with checked *kafiyehs* on their heads, galloped about with their rifles slung at their backs, and would pull their steeds up suddenly in mid-career. They all rode mares, and were followed by the colts, that uttered plaintive whinnys if the mothers went too fast, the latter then stopping dead and waiting until their foals had come up with them.

Mares are usually the only property of any value that an Arab possesses, and very often three or four men will hold a valuable animal in common, each man laying claim to a leg, and this makes it sometimes difficult for a European to buy a good mount here, as he has to come to terms with so many owners.

Deforestation has gone on throughout this district, as in most parts of Persia ; in fact, wood was so scarce a commodity at Ahwaz when the writer was there, that the brick-kilns were actually fed with chaff, the staple fodder of all animals. The town itself could only boast of a couple of palm-trees and no other vegetation, though the district when under the Khalifate had been famed for its sugar-cane plantations.

Despite the great heat, the climate is by no means unhealthy. The evenings are comparatively cool, and at night the temperature goes down to 74° Fahrenheit, the tremendous wind dying away at sunset and turning into a refreshing breeze, soothing the sleepers on the flat roofs of the houses.

From Ahwaz a small steamer, the *Shushan*, lying on the far side of the rapids, conveys the traveller up the river to within a six or seven miles' ride of Shuster. This town was formerly supposed to be built near the site of the Achæmenian capital Susa, in which was Shushan, the palace mentioned in the Book of Daniel ; but in reality the great mounds of this famous city lie some fifteen miles south-west of Dizful.

Shuster has a famous dam and bridge, the latter said by Persians to have been built from the designs of the captive Roman Emperor Valerian, who was kept a prisoner until his death by his conqueror Shapur I.

The town, one of the dirtiest in Persia, is terribly hot during the summer, 128° indoors at midday being the usual reading ; consequently the well-to-do spend their time in *sirdabs* or underground apartments. All over Persia the *badgir*, or wind-towers, will attract the attention of the traveller as he approaches any considerable town, and he will find that they are shafts to

conduct the air down to a kind of cellar in which is usually a tank of water. In spite of the draught of air, these places always smell unpleasantly, probably owing to the presence of the stagnant water and the absence of sunlight, and cannot be healthy.

Though really outside the scope of this chapter, yet the writer feels that a short mention of the Susa of the Greeks and the Shushan of the Bible, may be of interest.

Madame Dieulafoy,<sup>1</sup> who accompanied her husband during his exploration of the great mounds of this once so famous city, has written a book full of information on his discoveries, many of which may be seen at the Louvre Museum.

But these excavations are, as it were, comparatively modern, when it is remembered that Susa was inhabited from the earliest times, and was the capital of the Kingdom of Elam, over which King Chedorlaomer, mentioned in the Book of Genesis,<sup>2</sup> ruled. This kingdom was finally incorporated into the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great.

Close to the great mound of Susa is the so-called tomb of Daniel, with its white plaster pineapple cone, and the events narrated in the Book of Esther occurred at Shushan.

The French, who have, by a concession, the exclusive right of excavating in Persia, have done much at Susa since M. Dieulafoy led the way, and it is to be hoped that the city will yield many more of its secrets to the spade of the excavator.

<sup>1</sup> "La Perse, la Chaldée et la Susiane."

<sup>2</sup> Genesis xiv. 9.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FAUNA AND FLORA

IN the "Land of the Lion and the Sun," the king of beasts was plentiful in olden times, the Achæmenian monarchs hunting it in the districts round Persepolis; and the magnificent sarcophagus of Alexander the Great, now in the Constantinople Museum, is supposed to portray the Macedonian fighting with Persian lions.

According to a well-known legend, the Sasanian monarch Bahram Gor won his crown by slaying two lions that were guarding the royal insignia, and on Sasanian seals this sovereign is represented as standing between these beasts and holding their forepaws in his hands. But nowadays the lion has almost died out, and perhaps Major St. John, who was attacked by a lioness in the forest near Shiraz in 1867, is the last European who has encountered these animals, although Lord Curzon heard one roar not far from Shuster, and was told that they were common on the banks of the Diz.

Major St. John writes <sup>1</sup> that lions are found throughout the province of Khuzistan and also in the oak forests south of Shiraz, where there are quantities of

<sup>1</sup> "Zoology of Eastern Persia," Blandford.

wild pig that live on the acorns, and in their turn become food for the lions. The native hunters kill these animals at rare intervals, and the *lutis*, or mountebanks, sometimes drag about a starved lion as a change to the usual bear or ape that accompanies them.

The dense forests of the districts round the Caspian, are haunted by tigers that are occasionally shot by Persian hunters, but Europeans seldom attempt to follow them through the jungle that they inhabit. The Romans are said to have drawn the tigers used for their games from this part of Persia which was called Hyrcania; the fur of these animals is thicker than that of the Indian tiger, the colouring less vivid, and the markings somewhat different.

Hilly country is the favourite home of the bear, and travellers occasionally come across a small grey species that can go as fast as a horse if disturbed. These animals are in the habit of frequenting the vineyards after sunset, and devouring enormous quantities of the fruit, and are particularly fond of walnuts.

There are few travellers who have not heard the blood-curdling laugh of the hyæna round their tents at night, and have not seen its slinking, hump-backed form as they started on their march when dawn was breaking. These creatures have a very bad reputation in Persia, as they are accused of attacking sleepers and are even said to have bitten off the limbs of children sleeping in the open; therefore it is curious that a dried hyæna-skin is a potent charm that forces all to love its possessor.

Leopards are met with from the north to the south, and the European camping will constantly see their tracks and hear the complaints of the peasantry whose

sheep and goats they have killed, but they do little damage when compared with the wolf, which is the prime depredator in the country. It hunts in packs and in couples, but is often seen alone, a rider galloping his hardest being unable to come up with the animal, which apparently is only going at a leisurely jog-trot. In the Meshed district, which is infested with these creatures, hunters devote themselves to the task of slaying them, and will carry the head of a wolf round to all the villages in the neighbourhood, demanding out of each flock an animal which is called the "wolf's-head sheep." If the shepherd sees from afar the hunter dangling his trophy, he will hasten towards him with an offering of money, begging him to accept it instead of a sheep, but if the *shikarchi* comes upon the flock unawares he has the right to take his fee in kind. Not long ago an Englishman came across eleven wolves lying on their backs sound asleep after a gorge, and managed to kill three of them, with the result that his huntsmen acquired a respectable flock of sheep.

An English fox-terrier is an almost irresistible dainty to wolves, which will pounce upon it in broad daylight if it linger far behind its master, and the writer knew one that had been seized in puppyhood by a wolf, but which was rescued by its brave mother; she, however, paid the penalty of being torn to pieces. According to the natives the eye and knuckle-bone of the wolf, when worn as a talisman, impart to the most cowardly a superhuman courage. Persians consider the wild boar to be *nejus*, or unclean, and if Europeans wish to eat ham or bacon they call it *gusht-i-bulbul* (nightingale's flesh) in order to "save the face" of the cook, who has to prepare the accursed

meat. Indeed, so far does this feeling go that if the most pious of Moslems had the misfortune to be killed by a boar, he would, through no fault of his own, become so unclean that he would be left for five hundred years in the fires of hell before he could be purified! And yet all grooms have, if possible, a wild pig in the stable, affirming that its breath is good for the horses and that it keeps the "evil eye" from them; and the European "lucky pig," worn as a charm, seems to have the same origin as this latter belief.

The pretty, silver-grey foxes are fairly common, and these vie with the jackals in devouring the grapes during the fruit season, reminding one of the Biblical allusion to the "little foxes that spoil the vines." Reynard has a great reputation for cunning in Persia, as the following children's story will testify:—

"A fox once stole the grapes in a garden," so it runs, "and the owner laid a trap for the thief, baiting it with meat. When the fox next visited the vineyard he saw the snare, and understanding its purpose he hurried to the wolf and bade him come to a feast that he had got ready for him. The stupid wolf was only too ready, and when the fox pointed out the meat he made a rush to seize it and was instantly caught in the trap. Reynard then scrambled to the top of the garden wall and made such an outcry that the owner came in haste, and, seeing the wolf, killed it; and when the coast was clear the fox descended and devoured the meat that the wolf in his struggles had thrown free of the snare!"

Saadi, however, does not give the animal so astute a character. "A fox," he writes, "was one day seen fleeing in an extremity of fear, and being asked what

was the matter, replied, 'I have heard that camels are being forced into the army.' 'You fool,' said his interlocutor; 'you are not a camel, and not in the least like one.' 'Hush!' answered the panic-stricken animal, 'if an enemy says I am a camel and I am captured, I have no friend to release me or to bear witness in my favour.'"

The jackals hunt in packs and make night hideous with their yells during the hot weather, when all windows must perforce be open. They roam round the towns and villages, doing much execution among the poultry, and being great pests in the vineyards; but it is a puzzle how they support life during the winter, as they do not appear to hibernate. The leader of the pack always utters its long-drawn howl to summon its followers on the coldest night. These will answer by short yelps and barks until all, as it were, have responded to the roll-call, and the pack will set off at full cry, its yells sounding in the distance much like the weeping of children. The Persians have proverbs regarding this animal, such as "The jackal dipped himself in indigo and then thought he was a peacock," and, "The yellow dog is brother to the black jackal," meaning that "one is as bad as another." These *shagals* will enter rooms at night, and the writer has been aroused more than once by the snorting of one of them prowling round her in search of food. They are harmless enough; but as they are said to be peculiarly liable to rabies their visits are certainly not to be encouraged.

The Arabic historian, Al Tabari,<sup>1</sup> relates that jackals first made their appearance in Persia during the reign of Khosru the Great, and the king, on making inquiries

<sup>1</sup> Nöldeke's translation.



as to the origin of this visitation, was told that these animals were in the habit of infesting any land in which injustice and corruption were rife. The monarch thereupon impressed upon his ministers the duty of acting uprightly, and it is said that as long as justice was paramount in the land there were no more jackals. At the present time these animals are very numerous in Persia, and it will be interesting to observe whether they will vanish if the Constitution, now in its infancy, accomplishes all that its admirers expect of it.

Throughout the Persian Plateau gazelle, or *ahu*, roam the vast plains, and the fleet wild ass haunts the *kavir*, or salt-desert, the Sasanian monarch Bahram Gor getting his nickname from his devotion to the chase of this animal. Tradition has it that he and his horse perished in a quicksand on one of these hunts, and relates that though the queen-mother brought a thousand men to the spot, who dug for a thousand days, yet no trace of the royal victim was ever found. The poet Omar Khayyam refers to this tragedy in the lines :—

“And Bahram, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass  
Stamps o’er his Head, but cannot break his sleep.”

The ibex and the wild sheep are found in the mountain ranges from north to south, and the writer has seen herds of both animals browsing on the same feeding-grounds, the Persian *shikarchis* looking upon this as most unusual. The animals leap from crag to crag of the dangerous mountains with marvellous agility, and it is a beautiful sight to see them bound down what looks like a precipice, then spring across a ravine and dash up another hill out of sight.

The native huntsmen do not greatly molest the hare as it is considered *nejus*, or unfit for food, though the tail of a hare placed under the pillow is recommended as a powerful soporific.

The mongoose and a large porcupine are found in the south, where pretty little jerboa rats are numerous on the desert plains; voles and marmots inhabit the north, and mice swarm everywhere.

But we must now say a few words about the domestic animals of Persia, the horse coming first in a country of keen riders. The big, somewhat ungainly-looking Turkoman with its long stride and fiddle-head is of the breed used by the man-stealing Turkoman in their forays, and has great powers of endurance, being able to go fifty or sixty miles daily with little food or water, besides being able to outpace any other kind of horse in Persia. The handsome, bay Karabagh, big-boned and a good weight carrier, is a favourite, it and the Turkoman being bred in the north, and the so-called Arab principally in the districts round Shiraz. These latter horses, a mixture of Persian and Arab, are delightful to ride, carrying their heads and tails proudly, being wonderfully sure-footed, and so full of spirit and endurance that Persians say they have *dil-i-buzurg* (a great heart); moreover, they get much attached to their owners, whom they will follow like dogs. Some are exported to India by way of the Persian Gulf, and are sold there under the name of "Gulf Arabs."

The common horse of the country, coarse-bred and heavy-footed, but serviceable, is called a *yabu*, or pony, and is used to mount servants or to carry water

and loads. As a rule a *yabu*, hung with bells and gaily-coloured woollen tassels, leads any large caravan of mules, these animals following it implicitly and refusing to set off on the march without its guidance.

Persians never clip their horses, and keep them much covered up. First a blanket over the whole body (the *perhan*), then a *jul*, or felt-lined covering, over which, during the winter nights, is drawn the *nammad*, a very thick and heavy felt covering which comes right up to the ears, and enables the animal to lie out in the open during the coldest weather, if its owner is travelling, and be none the worse for lack of shelter. The slowly-moving camel is invaluable as a weight-carrier in a country devoid of roads, the handsome humped Khorasan variety being seen in the north; and the ordinary kind being used in the south and torrid Baluchistan. "The life of a camel is but forty days" is a Persian saying, and it is considered a risky proceeding to invest much capital in these animals, as they cannot be loaded when quite young and only last about six years in full work. They cost from ten to twelve pounds, and have such brittle bones that they are apt to break their long legs on the least provocation, a spell of muddy weather being fatal to many. When this happens they are killed and sold as food to the poorest classes; but the corpse will only fetch about a pound.

In the spring, if they are what Persians call *mast*, or mad, they will roar horribly, foam at the mouth, out of which comes a red bladder, and fight with one another. According to the *shuturchis* (camel-men) an animal in this state will wreak vengeance on a driver who has maltreated it. As the kick of a camel can kill a man,

and as the creature has a habit of pressing the life out of any prostrate adversary with its hard chest-pad, it is most formidable when in a rage, though very docile at other times, a tap on its tender neck guiding it easily.

Camels can forage for themselves where a horse or mule would die of starvation. They devour the prickly camel-thorn on the barren plains with apparent relish, and are able to go for some time without water, Dr. Stein mentioning that his camels on one occasion did not touch water for a fortnight. When they are doing long marches they are driven into camp at night and made to kneel down in a circle, their drivers putting great balls of barley dough into their mouths; or they will solemnly chew away at a big mound of chaff placed on a sheet of sacking in their midst. Awkward as they appear to be, Persians comparing a clumsy man to a camel on a ladder, they climb hills with ease when freed from their loads; but the way in which they are fastened to one another when on the march is a cruel one, a string attached to the tail of the leading camel being passed through the nostril of the second, and so on. Perhaps this is why these evil-smelling beasts grumble so prodigiously when loaded up!

The *mahri*, or riding-camels, can travel at a good pace, and throughout Baluchistan the camelry is a picturesque sight, a couple of Baluchis armed with mediæval-looking shields and spears bestriding each animal. "This camel lies at your door" is the Persian equivalent to "Your sin has found you out."

The fine, sure-footed, much-enduring mule is the animal *par excellence* of the Persian uplands, as it can do its twenty-five miles a day with a load of two to three hundred pounds, which it carries up and down

rocky passes that often require careful walking on the part of a European even if unencumbered.

The little Persian donkey is usually a beast of burden, spending its life in carrying bricks, manure, or brushwood. Yet, curiously enough, it is a favourite steed for well-to-do merchants, priests, and suchlike, who look ridiculous to European eyes as they bestride a diminutive animal that is almost hidden by their voluminous draperies. The magnificent white asses from Bahrein fetch very high prices, and have excellent paces. According to Mohammedan law asses are unclean, and no one may partake of their flesh or milk. Persians slit the nostrils of these creatures, affirming that it enables them to breathe more freely; and when, at last, the donkey drops under its load and dies in harness, its body is dragged outside the city to serve as food for the pariah dogs, its end having suggested the proverb, "He is like a dying ass with the dogs longing for him to draw his last breath," which describes the attitude of greedy heirs awaiting the decease of a rich relative.

Throughout Persia the cows are small, those of Gilan and Baluchistan being a humped breed, and beef, being considered a low-class food, is never seen on a well-to-do Persian's cloth—indeed, it is usually an inferior meat from lack of proper feeding.

The dog can hardly be looked upon as a domestic animal, though Persians are often fond of their *tulas*, or pet-dogs, and sportsmen are proud of their greyhounds and mongrel pointers. The shepherds employ savage, shaggy creatures nearly as big as mastiffs to guard their flocks, and clip their ears, with the idea that this mutilation will prevent them from straying. But these apart, the mangy, half-starved pariah that roams

the streets of every Persian town, and makes night resound with its barking, is merely a scavenger, and is regarded with justice as being unclean. Saadi says that, though the noblest of created beings is man and the meanest a dog, yet a grateful dog is better than an ungrateful man; moreover, it is written in a holy book that a dog has seven qualities, of which if a man had one he would go to heaven.

Though there is often a lack of water during the summer, yet *rabies* is hardly known in Iran; but if a dog happens to go mad the Persians believe that it has either been bitten by a snake or has eaten hot bread! They also affirm that if it bites any one, and the injured person can place one of the dog's singed hairs on his wound, he will be cured.

The long-haired cat called "Persian" in Europe is rarely seen in the country, though there are countless short-haired black, tabby, and carrot cats, usually with a half-starved appearance. A black cat is always treated with a certain respect, as it may possibly be the home of a *jinn* or a demon, and a Persian gentleman amused the writer by advising her in all seriousness never to meddle with such a creature.

The bird-life of Persia is, as a rule, not abundant, owing to the lack of food and water, but the sportsman or naturalist on landing at Enzeli on the Caspian and being rowed across the *Murdab* (Dead Water), on his way to the capital, will see a veritable paradise of water-fowl.

Pelicans in hundreds are busily fishing; black, snake-necked cormorants are diving after their prey; graceful cranes watch the water with keen eyes; geese and swans are swimming about; gulls are swooping through the air;

and the islets and masses of reeds appear to be swarming with duck, teal, coot, snipe, and every variety of water-bird.

The only other part of Persia where bird-life can be found in profusion is the *Hamun*, or great Lagoon, in Sistan, and Major Sykes<sup>1</sup> has given an account of the tribe of *saiads*, or fowlers, who live on the banks of the lagoon and make their living by capturing the water-fowl in nets, into which they drive them down lanes cut in the reed-beds. These men pay the greater part of their taxes in the form of feathers, of which they collect some 4,000 lbs. annually, and they propel themselves about in their clumsy reed rafts (*tutins*) with marvellous skill.

In the rainy zone round the Caspian there is plenty of game in the forests, pheasant and woodcock being particularly abundant; but on the Plateau of Persia the bird-life is for the most part scanty, and the traveller must be on the look-out if he wishes to see eagles, hawks, ravens, and chattering choughs, though vultures and grey and black crows are fairly common. In the spring the storks nest on the gateways and ruined *minars* of some of the towns, the Persians calling them *hajis*, because they say that they have spent the winter at Mecca, and are, therefore, entitled to the honourable sobriquet of "pilgrims"; and a visitor to the country may, if lucky, see—

"the files

In marching order spread, of long-necked cranes,  
Stream over Casbin and the Southern slopes  
Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,  
Or some froze Caspian reed-bed, Southward bound  
For the warm Persian sea-board."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Ten Thousand Miles in Persia."

<sup>2</sup> "Sohrab and Rustum," Matthew Arnold.

and, what he will forget still less, the wild, haunting cries of these birds as they wing their way at night far above his head, the piercing note of the thousands migrating having an indescribably eerie effect as it falls through the darkness.

The vultures, which are seldom seen on an ordinary day's march, apparently arrive from nowhere whenever an animal dies on the road; and the writer remembers noticing a poor little donkey that had fallen over the precipice, its pack-saddle being left on its back in eloquent tribute to the life of unceasing toil in which the animal had finally laid down its life. The great blue vault of heaven seemed absolutely empty, when suddenly and noiselessly a large vulture swooped down on to the corpse, to be followed by another and yet others, all steering unerringly to the spot, guided by their marvellous power of vision.

If the traveller is fond of shooting there are bustard in the north, quail in the spring, the little *tihu*, partridge and sand-grouse everywhere, the splendid francolin being mostly found in the south and in the Caspian provinces. The few rivers, streams, and swamps harbour duck, teal, snipe, wild geese, herons and bittern, and in the spring the gardens are haunted by a profusion of birds. Blackbirds, thrushes, the rose-plumaged *pastor*, the terror of the gardener from its voracity as it appears in flocks, the iridescent bee-eater with its high, sweet note, the cheery cuckoo, and the blue jay that Persians say can never be killed. The writer heartily wishes that this superstition were true, as the sight of these lovely birds in company with some golden orioles flitting about the dark foliage of cypresses, once made a picture that will not be soon forgotten.



Swallows skim over the ground, and if possible are lured into the houses, for they bring luck, the Persians putting up swings for them in the hopes of persuading them to nest there ; owls, on the contrary, bring disaster, Saadi writing of this bird, "Wherever thou sittest thou destroyest." Certainly any one hearing the unearthly yells of the great screech-owl cannot be surprised at the belief. Magpies abound in the spring and Persians do not appear to have any superstition connected with these birds. They are fond of catching a young one to keep as a pet, giving it a pellet of opium in the belief that after partaking of the juice of the poppy it will never forsake its new home, and laughing immoderately as the unlucky bird staggers about sick and bewildered.

The crested hoopoe recalls the legend of how a flock of these birds once found King Solomon asleep in the sun, and immediately hovered over him, spreading out their wings to protect him from the burning rays. When the monarch awoke he was much pleased, and inquired how he could reward the birds for their devotion, and at their request gave them golden crowns. The story runs, that a small boy throwing stones one day, brought down a hoopoe by accident and carried his pretty victim home. It was then found out that the crest on its head was formed of pure gold, and thereupon the poor birds were so mercilessly hunted for this mark of the king's favour that before long they returned in a body to Solomon to beg that their little feather adornments might be restored to them, which was accordingly done, and ever since then they are called by the potentate's name.

Flocks of pigeons are to be found everywhere, and in

Meshed hundreds of these birds live round the Shrine and Mosque, being accounted sacred, though if they rashly leave the shelter of the city they are shot down with impunity. The soft note of the dove is not often heard, and the bird is always depicted with a bleeding heart, which Persians account for by the following tale. A dove, they say, stole three grains of wheat from a destitute orphan child, and when it realised what it had done, it was so overcome with grief that its heart bled. It is also believed that three drops of blood issue from the bird's beak whenever it coos, and it is called the lover of the gloomy cypress, the tree of the graveyard, the more cheerful nightingale being supposed to be enamoured of the rose.

These brown *bulbuls* sing charmingly when kept in cages, and are fed on a special diet of maggots, peas, sugar, and various greenstuffs, being covered up from noon to three o'clock in order that they may enjoy their siesta with the rest of the Persian world. Inside each cage a tiny green bag is hung, supposed to contain a charm to avert the dreaded "evil eye"; and during the summer months a rose is stuck through the wires in order to inspire the little songster to trill its best.

Pretty crested larks hop about the barren Persian plains, and their cheery twittering breaks the great silence that always strikes any traveller in the country, and in the spring their rapturous songs are a joy to hear. The sagacious-looking crows, which are always found in and round the towns and villages, have passed into the folk-lore of the country. For example, it is lucky to hear a crow caw from the housetop if any one is on a journey, and if a girl seeing the new moon for

the first time, manages to catch the eye of a crow (no easy task, I should imagine) fate will be propitious to her during the coming month.

Geese, fowls, ducks, and turkeys are all domesticated, the latter going by the name of the "elephant bird," and doing particularly well in the dry climate. According to Sir John Malcolm <sup>1</sup> the first turkeys in Persia were brought from a vessel wrecked on the Persian Gulf and were looked upon with a certain awe by the inhabitants. Peacocks, introduced from India, are only permitted to be kept by royalty, and this prerogative has been extended to the British Minister at Tehran, these birds adorning the beautiful Legation garden.

Such a commonplace "fowl" as the domestic cock is capable of bringing disaster upon a house if it refuses to restrict its crowing to the lucky hours of noon, midnight, and nine o'clock in the morning, Persians often killing the bird if it is inconsiderate in that way. The saying "He is a cock that crows at the wrong time," is used to describe a man devoid of tact.

No dinner-party at the capital would be complete without a salmon smothered in sauce, a lemon in its mouth and a bouquet on its tail, the fish coming from the Caspian, where the splendid sturgeon and salmon fisheries are leased to a Russian Company. In the Persian Gulf with its sharks, porpoises, and beautiful blue "guard fish" there is an abundance of fish, which is salted for export. The few rivers of Persia seem to afford little sport for the disciple of Isaak Walton, though the Lar river, not far from Mount Demavend, used to be full of trout.

<sup>1</sup> "Persian Sketches."

The reptile life is chiefly represented by lizards great and small and of many varieties, that copy their surroundings so closely that in one part of Persia where the ground was strewn with black and red *débris* from the volcanic hills around, it was almost impossible to distinguish the little creatures when they were motionless. There are ungainly monster lizards to be found in the south, living in dens like rabbit burrows, dug in the sandy soil of the desert, and the Persians believe them to be poisonous; but as they have the same opinion about the smallest of the species their testimony is unreliable.

Snakes are comparatively rare, but are much dreaded by the inhabitants, who fail to distinguish between the noxious and the harmless varieties. They are sometimes to be found in gardens, attracted by the water; a formidable horned viper inhabits the arid plains of Baluchistan; Major St. John killed a cobra at Bushire; and the grassy uplands to the north of Meshed appear to be infested with a harmless snake, as the nomads assure the traveller that they do not attack good Mohammedans! Persians have a superstition that these reptiles are in the habit of guarding hidden treasure.

In parts of north-east Persia, yellow-shelled tortoises appear in great numbers during the spring, the low hills being pitted with their holes. They move about with surprising alacrity in search of food, living chiefly on a kind of wild pea which grows among the scanty herbage. Frogs abound in every tank and make night melodious with their croaking; but the writer was struck by the apparent absence of the common earth worm, which, according to Darwin, plays such an important part in the fertilisation of the soil.

The insect life is luckily not very plentiful in the uplands of Persia owing to the lack of water, though Sistan has an unenviable reputation for pests of this kind owing to its great marshy lagoon ; and scorpions, which appear to be more or less independent of water, are found everywhere. Strict attention to sweeping out every room daily is imperative, as otherwise these insects, and the disagreeable tarantula spiders, would secrete themselves in corners or in any hole of the mud walls. There are both black and yellow scorpions from one to four inches long, and their sting is greatly dreaded, as the pain inflicted is said to be agonising.

The tarantulas, fawn-coloured or black, with hairy legs and mouths like a miniature beak, have the power of springing. A tarantula-hunt is often attended with difficulties, the insect vanishing in the most uncanny way, reappearing in another part of the room, and filling its pursuer with a horrible apprehension that it may leap upon him. Persians, who dread them, affirm that they spring in this way when about to bite, though the writer never came across any one who had suffered ; the only case coming under her notice being that of a cat which sank into a kind of coma for a couple of days, and lay basking in the sun without eating, but finally recovered. These tarantulas attain a large size in the south, one captured at Kerman, three inches in length, trying to attack its captor, and hissing like a snake when secured in an insect net.

Centipedes are of a great size in some districts, and it is advisable not to touch them if crawling over any exposed part of the body, as if disturbed they will cling to the flesh with the suckers with which their

many feet are provided and inflict a long, festering wound. Yet perhaps sand-flies are the greatest insect pest of Persia, particularly in the south, ordinary mosquito netting being of no avail in keeping out these minute intruders, which have a sting as sharp as the prick of a needle, and cause an intense irritation. They cannot stand a draught of air, being too light to make headway against it; but in summer the nights are usually very still and give them full opportunity. The ordinary house-fly appears in legions as soon as it gets warm; but Indian *chicks* and muslin blinds do much to abate this hot-weather curse. This intrusive insect, however, is difficult to circumvent when the traveller is camping during the summer, because if he makes his journeys at night on account of the heat, he must perforce try to sleep during the day. This is hard to do in a stifling tent with the incessant buzz of myriads of these insects doing their best to penetrate through the cage of netting with which he has protected his head and shoulders.

He must also beware of ticks when pitching his tent or sleeping in a caravanserai. Both sheep and camels leave these unpleasant insects on the ground where they have lain, and Dr. Wills<sup>1</sup> writes that the large camel tick inflicts a nasty wound that takes a long time to heal; and he says that these insects when gorged with the blood of their victims, become as large as small cockchafers. These latter insects are not abundant, but appear in the spring; and if a flight of them descend upon the traveller's tents, he will have a disagreeable experience, as the creatures will crawl into his bedding and get into every conceivable nook and cranny.

<sup>1</sup> "Land of the Lion and the Sun."

Locusts are often a great calamity to the peasants, coming in swarms, devouring the crops and bringing starvation on the afflicted districts. In summer the ground is alive with grasshoppers ; wasps and hornets invade the houses to build their nests on the ceilings ; big black beetles live in the mud walls and floors, as do often the mole-crickets ; bees of many kinds hum in the gardens ; and out on the plains the little ant-lions lie in wait for their prey at the bottom of their holes.

This is by no means an exhaustive account of the animal and insect life of Persia, and has no pretensions to be of any scientific value, but is merely what the observant traveller may come across in his journeyings.

### THE FLORA

The flora of Persia is a decided disappointment to those who have taken their ideas of the country from the gardens of roses celebrated by Tom Moore in his "Lalla Rookh." Once on the great Persian Plateau, the traveller may ride for days across the wide plains without meeting a flower, unless in the early spring, when he will see a sprinkling of *rosa Persica*, mauve crocuses, garlic, the camel-thorn a mass of rosy bloom, tiny scarlet tulips, irises, hyacinths, and narcissus. Convolvulus, chicory, peas, and cornflowers are in the fields ; but usually only veitch and camel-thorn clothe the barren expanse, unless it be among the hills. Here the streams have always a border of grass along their banks, and sweet-brier, barberry, and tamarisk grow in profusion, tiny cyclamen, candytuft, asphodel, colchicum and forget-me-not being abundant, also the

tall assafoetida, the white hollyhock, the stately *eremuri*, the great red poppy, and the blanket-leaved mullein. Spring flowers are also in plenty on the grassy uplands of Mazanderan and in the districts round the Caspian, but this display is only seen in a few places.

The gardens contain nothing rare in the way of flowers; and this is not surprising, as it is said that many of the English garden-flowers come from Persia. In the spring violets come first, and line the *jubs* (water-courses); then masses of purple and white irises, tiger-lilies, tulips, pansies, and later balsams, zinnias, petunias, marigolds, wallflowers, and asters fill the sunk beds, which are irrigated at frequent intervals. The tumbled-looking pink rose is everywhere, and from its blossoms rose-water is distilled; moss-roses there are in plenty, and handsome orange, yellow, or white single roses, one species having different colours on the upper and under sides of its petals.

Most of the ordinary English vegetables are grown in Persia, such as potatoes (introduced by Sir John Malcolm in the time of Fath Ali Shah), spinach, pumpkins, vegetable marrows, onions, turnips, and carrots. Peas, beans, celery, seakale, and tomatoes when sown do remarkably well and yield splendid crops. The aubergine and the slimy lady's-finger are cultivated, as are also short, fat cucumbers, delicious in flavour and in such profusion that some years ago a hundred could be bought for a penny, thus making them a staple food for the poor. In the spring wild rhubarb, asparagus, chardon, and a large mushroom are found in the hills, all excellent of their kind. The fruit-season is marshalled in by the sickly white mulberry, followed by cherry, plum, peach, nectarine



apricot, apple, and pear. The walnuts, almond, and pistachio grow well, and grapes are in profusion and of several kinds. Oranges from the large *portugal* to the fragrant *mandarin* are produced in favoured spots, and the small green-skinned lime is in great request for sherbets. Perhaps the melon is the fruit *par excellence* of Persia. It is of many kinds, from the *hindivana*, the water-melon, usually scarlet-fleshed with black seeds, to the huge white melons sometimes 70 lb. in weight, which are grown near Isfahan, and which they say will burst if a horse gallops past when they are ripe. The splendid pomegranate makes a delicious fruit syrup; and Persians put their well-flavoured quinces into niches round the walls of their rooms, in order to enjoy the odour. There are no gooseberries, currants, raspberries, or strawberries in the country; though the berries of the wild barberry might do duty for the currant; and the strawberries in the English gardens at Tehran and Meshed grow in such profusion that in the latter town 30 lb. of the fruit were gathered daily from the beds of one garden at the height of the season.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MARCO POLO IN PERSIA

THROUGH the centuries that have elapsed since the Arab conquest of Persia, many travellers have visited Iran. Catholic friars bent on converting Mohammedans ; traders pursuing commerce in the Caspian or the Persian Gulf ; ambassadors from different nations paying court to Shah Abbas (the Grand Sophy, as they called him from a mispronunciation of his dynastic title) ; gallant gentlemen—adventurers such as the Sherley brothers ; or master-craftsmen like the French jewellers Tavernier and Chardin, with others whom it would take too long to enumerate.

Chief of these, and among the earliest travellers, stands out the great name of the trader Marco Polo ; and to Venice belongs the honour of being the birthplace of the greatest Asiatic traveller that the world has ever known.

Owing mainly to her geographical position, the wealth of the East poured through the City of the Waters, and at the height of her power the Republic was the great commercial centre of Europe, and had almost the whole carrying trade of the West. Ducats were the current coin of Asia for centuries, even down to the time of the English traveller Pottinger, who

writes that he laid in a stock of "Venetians" for his travels in Persia and Baluchistan early in the nineteenth century.

When Marco Polo started off with his father and uncle on years of adventure, they first crossed Persia and then made their way from Kashgar *via* the great Gobi Desert to China, the "Far Cathay" of the Middle Ages, where they lived for seventeen years at the Court of great Kublai Khan. Their journey was certainly beset with many perils; but in one way it was easier to travel in Asia in the thirteenth century than it is at the present day. The whole of the continent was in the powerful grip of the Mongols, and though the empire founded by Chinghiz Khan was split up into different kingdoms, yet there was no danger of passing from friendly to hostile territory as was the case in the nineteenth century, when Conolly and Stoddart were murdered at Bokhara. The great trade routes were kept open to European enterprise by the enlightened Mongol rulers, and Venice, a city that owed all its wealth to commerce, took advantage of this fact. In this twentieth century there is no ruler in Asia who could give a golden tablet to his ambassador, by means of which that envoy would be provided with escorts, baggage-animals, and food throughout the length and breadth of the vast continent; but this is just what Kublai Khan did on two occasions to the Polos.

Marco Polo speaks in no stinted terms of the great use of these tablets, that acted as a kind of "open sesame" wherever he went, and provided transport and commissariat in abundance, these being the main difficulties of Persian travel at the present day.

A glance at the map shows that Persia lies on the "highway of the nations," and in the days of Marco Polo it was rich and prosperous, owing to the wealth of China and India pouring into its emporium of Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. From here it was laboriously conveyed on the backs of camels and mules over passes eight thousand feet high to the Iranian Plateau, and then travelled by way of Kerman and Yezd up to Balkh or to Tabriz, from which great centres it was distributed.

The south-eastern part of Persia must have been much as it is now, that is, to use Major Sykes' <sup>1</sup> phrase, "partly desert pure and simple and partly desert tempered by oases." The deforestation, however, that has gone on steadily through the centuries has done much to decrease the rainfall, always scanty, and thus has fatally injured a country which lacks only water to make its unpromising-looking soil produce abundantly.

The descendants of Hulagu Khan were rulers of Persia when the Venetians visited the country, and these princes acknowledged Kublai Khan as their overlord, stamping their coinage with his name and transacting their business with the Chinese seals he gave them.

Owing to Marco Polo's habit of not telling us which were the places he actually saw, and which were those that he described from hearsay, there has been a considerable difference of opinion as to the route he took when he started from Acre on his years of travel. Sir Henry Yule, his talented translator and editor, considers that the Venetian travelled *viâ* Mosul and Baghdad down the Shal-el-Arab, past Busreh, to

<sup>1</sup> "Ten Thousand Miles in Persia."

Hormuz on the Persian Gulf ; but Major Sykes, who has had the advantage of studying several of these questions on the spot, thinks from internal evidence that the Polos entered Persia near Tabriz, travelling by way of Kashan, Yezd, and Kerman down to Hormuz. At this point, perhaps fearing to brave the many crosswinds and contrary currents of the Gulf in the unseaworthy craft tied together with twine, that Marco Polo stigmatises as "wretched affairs," they turned north again, and crossing the Great Desert, reached Balkh.

However this may be, we know from the Venetian's own words that he did visit Tabriz, and the next point of interest was his halt at Saba, or Sava, some eighty miles south-west of the modern Tehran. Here the "Three Wise Men" of Gospel narrative were supposed to have lived, tradition ignoring the fact that frankincense and myrrh do not grow in Persia, and Marco Polo, with characteristic honesty, complains that he could get no accurate information about the Magi. He speaks, however, of their tombs, evidently being unaware that the reputed bodies of the "Three Kings" had, after numerous vicissitudes, been enshrined in Cologne Cathedral in 1164.

Our traveller mentioned Yezd, or Yasdi, as "a good and noble city," and at the present day it still retains much of its commercial importance, its merchants being accounted among the most enterprising in Persia. The silk he speaks of is still one of its chief manufactures, as is also the *yasdi*, if it be the handsome shawl-patterned material known as *hasan kuli khan* that is a *specialité* of the city. The position of the town on the edge of the desert with rolling sand-dunes close to its high walls, is not inviting ; but it owed

its former prosperity to being on the great caravan route.

Kerman, the next halt made by the Venetians, was prosperous from the same cause ; and both cities, being somewhat inaccessible, had escaped the brunt of the terrible Mongol invasion. Marco Polo would hardly recognise the squalid mud-domed Kerman of to-day, which covers only about a quarter of its former area, and is surrounded by crumbling ruins, as it stands near two steep limestone spurs on which are the scanty remains of the fortresses attributed to Ardeshir. The most prominent object in the city is the half-destroyed greenish-blue dome of a mosque in which is an inscription dating its foundation from 1242, and therefore it must have been newly erected at the time of the Polos' visit in 1271.

The Venetian speaks of the embroideries of Kerman "with figures of beasts and birds, trees and flowers, and a variety of other patterns," and mentions the "hangings" made there. At the present day, the city, though producing beautiful shawls and embroideries, is chiefly noted for its carpets that are among the finest in the world. Curiously enough, for a Mohammedan country, at the time of Marco Polo's first visit the province was ruled by an energetic princess, and years later, on his return from China, he found her daughter on the throne, a high-handed lady who murdered her brother, and in her turn was strangled by his widow and her own sister.

When Marco Polo left Kerman on his way to the Gulf he says : "When you leave the city you ride on for seven days, always finding towns, villages and handsome dwelling-houses, so that it is very pleasant

travelling." This cannot be said to be the case now, for, to give one example, there is only a mud tea-house on the twenty-three miles between Kerman and Mahun, above which village the Venetian probably entered the hills by the old caravan route to Hormuz. But in the environs of Kerman there are remains of forts and villages in all directions, showing the former prosperity of a district, that now is depopulated; and Marco Polo's important city of Camadi has been identified with the extensive ruins of the modern Shahr-i-Jiruft from which many coins, beads, and pottery have been exhumed.

Even at the present day Persian roads are by no means secure for unarmed travellers, and the Venetians nearly lost their lives on their way south to the coast, being attacked by bandits in a dense fog. This they thought was caused by enchantment, not knowing that they are fairly common at certain seasons in the province of Kerman.

The old Persian saying runs thus: "Were the world a ring, Hormuz would be the jewel in it," and this probably is an allusion to the immense wealth formerly enjoyed by this port on the Persian Gulf, all the gold, spices, silks, ivory, jewels, and drugs of India and China being brought here to start on their long journeys north and west. It cannot be out of compliment to the climate, for Marco Polo speaks of that as "sickly"—a very appropriate term to those who know its capacity for fever; nor can it be in reference to the natural charms of a spot baked by a torrid sun, which has no vegetation and a most scanty water supply. In the days of the Venetian the trade had been removed from the island of Hormuz to the mainland, and the big, bustling

emporium was a very different-looking place to squalid Bandar Abbas, the modern port nearest to its former site.

As we have said before, Marco Polo did not take ship at Hormuz, but struck northwards again to Kerman, from where he crossed the great desert, the Lut that cuts Persia in half, and is a terrible obstacle to commerce. His experiences, owing to the lack and badness of the water, were decidedly unpleasant, as indeed have been those of other travellers in this inhospitable region. M. Khanikoff, the Russian traveller, speaks of this district as "a desert unequalled in aridity on the whole of the Asiatic continent, for the Gobi and Kizil Kum are fertile prairies compared to the Lut."

When he emerged from this desert, our traveller speaks of the *arbre sol*, or *arbre sec*, of Khorasan, probably a gigantic plane-tree, some of these at the present day being a mass of rags and votive offerings, and regarded with a superstitious awe from their size and rarity. There is a curious old Persian picture representing Alexander the Great demanding to learn his fate from the *arbre sol*. The tree, which is hung all over with the heads of different animals, presumably to signify its power of speech, is reported to have replied, to the great General's questionings, "Thou shalt conquer the world, but thou shalt never see Macedonia again." Beyond the tree two Persian saints are depicted seated by a pool from which they are drawing and eating the fish of everlasting life, and in Saadi's *Gulistan* we have a reference to this legend in the words, "Hast thou heard that Alexander went into darkness, and after all his efforts, could not taste the water of immortality?"

The great conqueror is depicted as holding his forefinger to his lips, an Oriental gesture of astonishment,



Saadi often using the expression to "bite the finger of amazement."

We cannot be sure from his narrative whether Marco Polo reached Balkh by way of Meshed and Nishapur or *viâ* Herat ; but his travels show us that Persia in the thirteenth century was far more prosperous and populous than Persia in the twentieth, while her communications to-day are almost in the same primitive state as they were in the time of the great Venetian.

After these experiences the three Polos made their way to the Court of Kublai, the great Khan of Tartary, the ablest of the successors of Chinghiz and the conqueror of China.

Here they stayed many years, and so attached became the monarch to the Polos, that he turned a deaf ear to all their hints that he should allow them to return home with their wealth. In fact there seemed every prospect that they would remain in China till their death, when envoys from Tabriz in north Persia arrived with the news that Kublai's grand-nephew, the Khan of Persia, was a disconsolate widower, and wished to replace his late wife by one of her relatives who dwelt near Peking. The young Princess Kokachin was selected for the honour ; but the ambassadors feared to take her by the long overland route to Persia with its hardships and perils, and begged the monarch to let them travel by sea. As they had no knowledge of sea-craft (no Persian has any at the present day) they urged that the Venetians, in whose powers they appeared to place boundless confidence, might accompany the party. Old Kublai Khan agreed to this with great reluctance, but gave the travellers a fleet of thirteen ships, and they set off on a voyage that lasted for two years. The would-be

bridegroom was dead when they reached their destination; but the lady was promptly married to his nephew, and wept when she said goodbye to her kind escort.

When the Polos reached Venice after an absence of nearly a quarter of a century, tradition has it that their relatives did not recognise them in their travelling garb of great sheepskin *pushteens*, with the wool worn inside as at the present day, and their huge, shaggy Tartar caps. To stimulate the memory of their kinsfolk they invited them all to a feast, after which, ripping up the seams of their travel-worn garments, a mass of precious stones poured out, to the amazement of the onlookers. At this sight, as the chronicler puts it with unconscious humour, "they recognised that, in spite of all former doubts, these were in truth those honoured and worthy gentlemen of the Cà Polo that they claimed to be . . . and straightway the whole city, gentle and simple, flocked to the house to embrace them and to make much of them with every conceivable demonstration of honour and respect."

Across the ages three travellers and geographers stand out from the rest—the Greek Herodotus, the Chinese Chang Ki'en, and lastly Marco Polo, the subject of this chapter.

The two former lived in the fifth and second centuries before Christ, and are therefore separated by a gulf of time from the Venetian, but all three visited Persia and great parts of Central Asia. To Marco Polo must be awarded the palm for the extent of his travels. To quote Sir Henry Yule,<sup>1</sup> "He was the first to trace a route across the whole longitude of Asia, naming and describing kingdom after kingdom which he had

<sup>1</sup> "Marco Polo."

seen with his own eyes: Persia, Badakshan, the Mongolian Steppes, China, Tibet, Burma, Siam, Cochin China, Japan, the Indian Archipelago, Java, Sumatra, the Andaman Islands, Ceylon, and India."

Before closing this chapter the writer must acknowledge her indebtedness not only to Sir Henry Yule's *magnum opus*, but also to Major Sykes<sup>\*</sup> for much of what she has written.

When she was the latter's companion at Kerman he was keenly interested in finding out the great Venetian's routes through the province of that name, and a summer tour in the hilly country round the city was made with the object of following in the footsteps of Marco Polo. Both were thrilled at the idea that perhaps they were the first Europeans since the time of the Venetians to pass along the old caravan route now disused; and one afternoon, riding across a grassy plateau in the Sardu, or Cold Country district, the ruins of a long-deserted caravanserai close to a steep pass gave them the certainty that they were standing on the edge of the "great descent" that Marco Polo had to negotiate in order to reach the city of Camadi, thus clearing up various disputed points as to his route to the Persian Gulf.

Throughout the writer's stay in Persia the great Venetian was in a way interwoven with her life. Almost wherever she travelled, be it by Kum, Kashan, or Yezd to Kerman; on the troublous, torrid waters of the Persian Gulf; or yet again in Makran with its fish-and-date-eating inhabitants, and its intense heat only tempered by occasional oases of palms, Marco Polo had preceded her.

<sup>\*</sup> "Journeys of Alexander the Great and Marco Polo" (Society of Arts, June 4, 1897).

## CHAPTER XV

### A GLANCE AT THE ANTIQUITIES OF PERSIA

THE traveller who has entered Persia by way of Bushire, and has surmounted the formidable *kotal*s that lie between the sea and Shiraz, will from that city go to visit the Achæmenian and Sasanian remains in the valley of the Polvar, some forty miles to the north.

If he is wise he will take Lord Curzon's "Persia" as his guide, for its masterly description of the history and purpose of the ruins he is about to see will both double his pleasure and save him from a sense of perplexity and confusion.

The most famous of these remains is Persepolis, situated on the wide plain of Mervdasht, and called Takht-i-Jamshid (Throne of Jamshid) by the Persians, who consider the immense platform is too great a work to have been performed by mere mortals, and therefore ascribe it to one of their legendary monarchs whose behests were carried out by *jinn*s and demons.

These terraces, once covered with palaces, halls of audience and fire-temples, are built out from the side of the mountain and faced with huge stones, some of which, according to Lord Curzon, are fifty feet long and six to ten in width. The celebrated staircase is

still *in situ*, the steps of which are so shallow that the traveller can ride up them with ease and arrive at the Porch of Xerxes with its enormous sculptured bulls. The stone work still left of these magnificent buildings, which Shah Abbas, among others, used as a quarry, was hewn from the mountains, the workmen chiselling the vast limestone blocks for the platform close to the scene of their labours, and thus saving the toil of transport.

The great audience hall of Xerxes, once supported on seventy-two fluted columns, only thirteen of which are still standing, is approached by four staircases, up which at No Ruz thronged the subjects of the King of Kings to pay tribute to their sovereign, or merely to gaze half bewildered at his splendour. Blazing with jewels, he would sit on a throne in the vast hall, a parasol, emblem of royalty, held above him, and attendants armed with fly-whisks beside him. Curtains would supply the place of walls to this audience-chamber, and would be raised when thousands were prostrating themselves to the earth before a sovereign whom they regarded as half divine.

Not far from this hall, so impressive even in its ruin, is the palace of great Darius. The stone doorways and windows are still standing, though the mud-brick walls, formerly adorned with stucco-work, enamel tiles or paintings, have now all disappeared, the frosts, rains, and sunshine of many centuries having converted them into rubble and washed them away. But the cuneiform inscription, informing us that this palace was begun by the son of Hystaspes and completed by Xerxes, is almost as clear as when first incised on the limestone; and the finely carved processions of armed warriors,

and the gigantic figure of the king killing a griffin of superhuman size, show to what a height art in Persia had attained some twenty-five centuries ago.

Behind the Propylæa of Xerxes the traveller visits the remains of the Hall of a Hundred Columns, built by Darius the Great ; and Lord Curzon<sup>1</sup> says that this vast reception-room, the cedar roof of which was once upheld by a hundred and sixteen pillars, is only surpassed in size by the hall of Karnak in Egypt. It has the indescribable fascination of being almost beyond doubt the palace fired by Alexander during a drunken revel ; for excavations have brought to light a mass of cedar-wood ash, not a trace of which is to be found in any other palace. Here, then, in the words of Dryden,

"Thais led the way  
To light him to his prey  
And, like another Helen, fired another Troy."

Perhaps what strikes the traveller most during a visit to Persepolis is the way in which everything is done to contribute to the glorification or semi-deification of the monarchs who built the palaces which they visited on occasions of ceremony. The sovereign is sculptured as seated in state on his throne with Ormuzd hovering above him ; or he is slaying some monster ; or half the peoples of Asia are represented as bringing tribute to his feet. This idea of the "Divine Right of Kings" is still extant in Persia and is carefully fostered in court circles, though sorely shaken in the land at large.

The wonderful outburst of art to which we owe these

<sup>1</sup> "Persia."



RUINS OF PERCEPOLIS, PROPYLEA OF XERXES





impressive ruins was influenced by both Assyria and Egypt, the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, and the occupation of the cities of the Nile by Cambyzes, bringing the Persians into contact with these great civilisations, from both of which they borrowed while preserving their own personality.

The kings in their palaces at Persepolis had of course vast crowds of retainers, and the royal city of Istakr rose on the plain to supply the needs of these latter, the remains of one of its great limestone gateways still standing, and a lofty fluted column with bull-headed capital marking the site of what was in old days a fire-temple.

The splendid rock-tombs of Naksh-i-Rustum, where Darius Hystaspes and three of his successors were laid to rest, are hewn out of a sheer wall of rock that rises to a great height above the plain. The tombs can only be reached by the aid of ropes, as they are between twenty-five to forty feet from the ground, and their carvings and inscriptions are still fresh ; but they have been entirely rifled of their contents.

The Zoroastrian command to expose all dead bodies to be consumed by the birds of prey was not followed by these sovereigns, though enforced under the Sasanian dynasty during which the priesthood had great influence. It may have been that the Achæmenians wished to copy the example of the Pharaohs.

Next in interest to Persepolis are the remains of Pasargadae, formerly the famous capital of Cyrus the Great, and situated in the valley of the Polvar on the plain of Murghab. Here is to be seen the Takht-i-Suleiman, or Throne of Solomon, that monarch

being frequently confused with the mythical Jamshid, as both are credited with having possessed superhuman powers. This great platform, built of blocks of limestone, so well fitted together that no mortar was either needed or used in its construction, once in all probability supported the audience-hall of Cyrus the Achæmenian, and at some distance from it stands a low pillar on which is a figure crowned and having two pairs of wings, one raised towards heaven and the other sweeping the earth. This figure is pointed out by Persians as the originator of their past greatness; and Lord Curzon says that the inscription, "I am Cyrus, the King, the Achæmenian," was formerly carved above the bas-relief.

From here the traveller will make his way to what is the most interesting of all the remains—that is, the tomb of Cyrus, spoken of by the Persians as the "Sepulchre of the Mother of Solomon." When perfect it resembled a small Greek temple with its pedimented roof and the surrounding colonnade, which latter has entirely disappeared. Yet, even in its ruin, the visitor who clammers up the steps of the pedestal on which it stands is thrilled at the thought that here almost beyond doubt lay the remains of the founder of the Achæmenian line. Alexander, who overthrew that dynasty, came some two centuries after the death of mighty Cyrus to pay his respects to one whom he admired with the sympathetic reverence that one great soldier may feel for another.

This cursory glance at what has descended to us from the centuries before our era would not be complete without some mention of Bisitun, twenty-four miles to the east of Kermanshah. On this fine ridge of rock,

rising 1,500 feet above the plain, are carved the exploits of Darius the Great, and the famous inscription that gave to the world the key of cuneiform writing. Lord Curzon<sup>1</sup> speaks of this inscription, the secret of which was unravelled by Sir Henry Rawlinson, as "the most important historical document, albeit in stone, next to the Damietta Stone, that has been discovered and deciphered in this century."

The remains of the Sasanian dynasty are principally in the form of magnificent rock-sculptures, perhaps the finest being carved on the cliff below the royal Achæmenian sepulchres to which we have already referred.

The Persians call these monuments *Naksh-i-Rustum* (Pictures of Rustum), because they imagine that they depict the exploits of their national hero, their knowledge of the history of Iran being entirely gleaned from the legends of the *Shahnama*. The most interesting commemorates the capture of the Roman Emperor Valerian by Shapur I. in 260 A.D. Shapur, above life-size, and adorned with the royal insignia, is mounted on horseback, and at his feet kneels the captive Cæsar, his hands outstretched as if beseeching mercy from his proud conqueror—mercy which was asked in vain. Beside Valerian is another Roman prisoner to whom Shapur is giving what is supposed to be the royal circlet, thus signifying his installation of Cyriades on the throne of the Cæsars.

Not far from Kazerun lie the mounds, the fragments of wall, and the masses of rubbish that once was Shapur, the celebrated capital of the Sasanian monarch, and which was destroyed during the Arab invasion.

<sup>1</sup> "Persia."

Hardly anything is left of this royal town ; but on the banks of the stream that runs through a defile are several rock-sculptures, three of which portray the proudest event of Shapur's successful reign—that is, the capture of Valerian. In one of these the Cæsar is being trampled beneath the horse of his conqueror, and another great panel, full of figures, commemorates Shapur investing Cyriades with the Imperial purple, the vanquished Valerian being a spectator of this scene so full of humiliation to him.

High up on the side of the valley is a huge cave still containing the much mutilated gigantic statue of Shapur, which is said to have been worshipped as a god, and is, moreover, interesting as being the only antique statue ever found in Persia.

Some four miles from Kermanshah are other remarkable Sasanian rock-sculptures at Tak-i-Bostan, or Arch of the Garden, and the finest of these, which show the influence of Greek art, are to commemorate the achievements of Khosru Parvis, whose reign is such a strange mixture of conquest and success during the first part, to be followed by defeat and misery at the last.

There are, of course, many other remains of the past, but this chapter does not aim at giving a description of all the antiquities of Persia, but merely points out, in a cursory way, those that are the most celebrated.

## CHAPTER XVI

### SPORT AND AMUSEMENTS

PERSIANS from their Shahs downwards have always been passionately fond of the chase, the murdered Nasr-ed-Din Shah loving to pursue the ibex and wild sheep in the numerous mountain ranges.

But the typical sport of Persia is a gazelle shoot, these fleet creatures being found almost everywhere, and roaming the plains in small herds. The usual method of securing them is to ride in a big party towards the *ahu*, the riders spreading out round the quarry and gradually closing in upon it. When the animals, which have taken little notice at first of the sportsmen, perceive that they are hemmed in, they try to break through the ring, and then ensues an exciting scene in which the firing is often reckless and leads to casualties among the riders as well as the game. Persians are able to handle a gun almost as well on horseback as off; for looping their reins on to the pommels of the high saddles in which they are tightly wedged, and turning right round in their seats, they fire behind, much as the Parthians of old discharged their celebrated arrows.

Hawks are occasionally employed in this sport, the birds dashing at the heads of the gazelle again and

again, with the result that the animals are confused and their speed is checked, thus enabling the horsemen and *tazi*, or greyhounds, to come up with them. So fleet are they that the expression, "To sell the skin of a gazelle before you have caught it," is the Persian equivalent of counting one's chickens before they are hatched, and a familiar curse is to wish that a man may have to "catch his bread from the horn of a gazelle," thus condemning him to starvation.

Hawking is a favourite form of sport, the birds sometimes being trained to kill the great bustard, or *obara*, of the plains, which is as large as a turkey ; and they are also used in partridge shooting. Marco Polo, who twice visited Kerman, speaks of the hawks found in that province as the best and swiftest in the world, and the writer, who has been present at partridge-drives in the district, has had the opportunity of watching the birds at work. On these occasions every one is on horseback, and the "beaters" rush up and down the hills, yelling at the top of their voices to drive the partridges into the stony valleys, along which the sportsmen dash, paying no attention to the stones of all sizes with which the ground is liberally strewn. Pointers of dubious breed flush the game which is dropped at very short distances by the eager guns, and the hawks swoop at intervals on their bewildered prey. It would be impossible to describe the hurly-burly and the savage appearance of the party, clad in long flying coats with striped scarves round their skull-caps, and armed with guns and hunting-knives, every man shouting until he is hoarse, and apparently half delirious with excitement. Another method of shooting partridges, very different to this noisy one, is for the native huntsmen to creep along

behind a screen made of bright colours that attracts the inquisitive birds to their doom.

Pheasants and woodcock abound near the Caspian, and the handsome francolin, or *doraj*, in the south. Quail shooting is a favourite spring pastime, the shooters tramping through the springing crops, and often accompanied by dogs which rouse the birds and make them fly up.

Flocks of wild geese, wild duck, and teal are found near the streams and swamps, as are also snipe, but these latter are too difficult a quarry for the clumsy Persian gun.

When any animal or bird is killed its throat must be cut before it breathes its last, with the formula, *Bismillah er rahman er rahim* (in the Name of God the all-Merciful). This is to render it *halal*, or fit for food, and the orthodox will not eat it if it is shot dead.

The Persian Plateau, however, cannot be looked upon in any sense as a paradise for sportsmen, the game being scarce owing to lack of water and the consequent sparseness of food. Pigeons are found everywhere, and are often secured by throwing stones down the *kanat* holes that they frequent and shooting as the birds fly out. Indeed, one of the favourite amusements of a Persian is to sally forth with his gun, and he usually brings down something, for he is bound by no etiquette as to what to shoot, any harmless and inedible "cocky-olly" bird being stalked and finally secured with much exultation.

Major St. John<sup>1</sup> mentions that a sport round Shiraz is to employ sparrow-hawks to catch the ubiquitous sparrow that haunts the *kanat* holes in hot weather.

<sup>1</sup> "Zoology of Eastern Persia." Blandford.

The birds fly up as a stone is flung down the shaft, and the hawk usually kills its prey before the sparrow can take refuge in the next open shaft; but sometimes the hawk in its eagerness follows its quarry down the water-course and can only be rescued with much difficulty. Fifteen or twenty sparrows are often killed in an hour's walk.

Pigeon-flying is much in vogue; but Dr. Wills,<sup>1</sup> who gives a capital account of this pastime, says that pigeon fanciers are looked upon with suspicion, as they have to go from roof to roof of the houses and therefore have many opportunities of glancing down into the *anderoons* of their neighbours.

Riding is perhaps the chief amusement in a country of horses; though the practice of racing a horse at its top speed and then pulling it up sharply when in full gallop is not one that commends itself to an English rider, and accounts for a weakness often observable in the hind-quarters of Persian horses. Racing, however, is not practised except at Tehran, where there are yearly horse-races, which, if report is to be believed, are not conducted according to the strict rules of fair play.

Persians have but few games. In olden days polo was the national pastime, and it is contended that it took its rise in Iran. It died out, however, some centuries ago, and has only been revived lately by the Europeans in the country.

The nomad tribes are accustomed to fire from horse-back at a lemon thrown into the air, or at an egg placed on a mound of sand, turning right round in their saddles and smashing it as they pass it at full gallop. Another sport, termed *doghela basi*, is for the rider

<sup>1</sup> "Land of the Lion and the Sun."



to fling a long stick on the ground with force and catch it as it rebounds into the air. Accidents frequently occur during this game, the players having sometimes been blinded; and on one occasion, at all events, the stick killed a horse by piercing its chest.

Wrestling is practised by all ranks, encounters of this kind exciting much interest, the object to be aimed at being to force the opponent to his knees; and nothing arouses more excitement among the spectators than such an exhibition. Bets are laid on the result, though the Prophet strictly forbade gambling; and a battle royal is occasionally the sequel, the frenzied spectators breaking the ring and beating the wrestler whom they are not backing!

Tipcat; also marbles (played with pebbles); a kind of rounders; draughts; backgammon; card games and chess comprise a limited repertoire. It is said that Shah Rokh, youngest son of Timur the Lame, got his name because his father was playing at chess when the news of his son's birth was brought to him. At the moment of the announcement the Tartar conqueror had checked his opponent's king with his castle, the move in Persia being called *Shah rok'h*.

As games of chance were prohibited by the Prophet, cards are looked upon askance by all pious Moslems, dancing and music being practically confined to professionals. It is considered degrading for a gentleman to practise either art; and the *lutis*, who are the chief performers, are looked down upon with contempt. The dancers posture, shuffle about ungracefully by pushing their feet from side to side; and a great achievement is to bend backwards, until the head touches the ground, and to walk in that position without the aid of the hands.

As to Persian music there is something curiously haunting about it; but the hearer must first set aside all his European ideas of the art; for to an ear trained to the octave the wild, tuneless music sounds like the fiddle-scraping of an orchestra before the overture commences. A gipsy-band will perhaps perform for his benefit, and he will notice how dirty are both the men and their instruments; but the skill with which they manage the latter will soon strike him. A dark-faced man in a turban will play on a kind of zither, tapping its many strings continuously with a pair of wooden sticks, while squatting beside him a grey-beard is fingering a curiously primitive guitar (*sitar*). This is made of mulberry wood, the whole of the hollowed-out body being covered in with parchment, and the long neck has frets like a Spanish guitar and carved head pegs to tighten up the three strings which are struck with a plectrum. Two men will scrape away with black horse-hair bows on instruments that remind the looker-on of mandolines, the bowls being made out of pumpkins strengthened with ribs of wood, ivory, and bits of metal, and each instrument has a handsomely incised long metal spike to support it on the ground. Of course every band will have its drums. There will be a large one (the *tumbak*), and a pair of small ones, the covers of these latter made of different skins in order to alter the tone. The players wet the parchment to render it more resonant, and thud it with marvellously supple fingers, and one of their number will tap incessantly on what looks like a huge tambourine (the *diara*). A pipe and a horn probably complete the equipment of the band, the latter emitting fearfully discordant and ear-splitting

brays. The singers give vent at intervals to what seems a series of shrieks and yells, rocking themselves to and fro and making the most agonising grimaces, while the veins of their necks swell with their efforts. But though a Persian singer, straining his high falsetto voice to the utmost, as he executes many a shake and tremulo, may not please European taste, yet his songs of love or war have an appeal from their very strangeness, and if heard at a distance conjure up some of the glamour and mystery of the East.

At all events, the national music is far superior to the brass band imported from Europe and now the fashion in Persia. Every instrument is usually out of tune, and men and boys of all ages perform, with a result that may be more easily imagined than described!

## CHAPTER XVII

### FOUR PERSIAN POETS

AFTER reading, among other books, Professor E. G. Browne's authoritative work on the literature of Persia, the writer saw that it would be impossible in a book of this kind to convey any real idea of such a large subject, and decided therefore that it would be more interesting to the general reader to give some account of the four great poets who enjoy a European reputation—Firdawsi, Omar Khayyam, Saadi, and Hafiz.

Glancing back through the centuries we find that the Avesta, or Zoroastrian Scriptures, is the only literature left by the Medes; the Achæmenian kings inscribed their achievements on the living rock, and the Parthian dynasty left no records at all. Under the Sasanian monarchs we hear of an epic written in Pahlavi, the spoken tongue, treating of the national legends, from which source Firdawsi, later on, drew largely for his great poem; but it is not until some time after the Arab Conquest that what we know as Persian literature came into existence, everything being written in Arabic until about A.D. 850. From that date, over a thousand years ago, there have been Persian

<sup>1</sup> "Literary History of Persia."

poets and writers, and so little has the language altered during this long interval that a Persian of to-day can read the earliest verse as easily as an Englishman can read Shakespeare.

This literary movement reached its climax about A.D. 1000 in Firdawsi's great patriotic epic, the *Shahnama*, in which he collected the legends of the Persian monarchs and heroes from the earliest ages, carrying on and incorporating the work of the Persian poet Daqiqi, who was murdered when he had only composed a thousand couplets of the national epic. Firdawsi, born in the tenth century, was a small landowner living near Tus, a town in north-east Persia famous for its poets, philosophers, and astronomers; and it is said that he wrote his poem in order to provide his only daughter with a good dowry.

It took over a quarter of a century to complete the sixty thousand couplets of the "Iliad of the East," as it has been called, and when finished Firdawsi dedicated it to that great patron of letters, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, who at first was delighted with the masterpiece. Unluckily for the poet, Mahmud's Vizier, who had introduced Firdawsi to his royal master, had powerful enemies, and these told the monarch that the epic savoured of unorthodoxy, and persuaded him to bestow on the writer a contemptible reward, some say giving him in silver the same number of coins that had been promised to him in gold.

Firdawsi, outraged at this insult, for so he deemed it, flung the money to the keeper of the public baths and to a seller of sherbet, and then fled from the vengeance that he knew would overtake him when

the Sultan should hear how his royal bounty had been spurned. He took refuge with a Persian prince, who persuaded him to suppress a bitter satire which he had composed upon Mahmud; and after several years he ventured to return to Tus, where he lived in peace and died at a great age.

His patron the Vizier had never forgotten him, and Professor Browne relates that the minister brought the poet to his royal master's remembrance in the following way. Mahmud, who was on a campaign, had just summoned a town to surrender, and said that he wondered what answer would be brought to him from the recalcitrant citizens.

"And should the reply with my wish not accord  
"Then Afrasiyab's field and the mace and the sword,"

quoted the Vizier, and the monarch asked for the name of the author of the spirited lines. On hearing that they were from the *Shahnama* and that the poet had never had any fitting reward for his great work, Mahmud, at last repenting of his former meanness, sent a caravan of camels laden with bales of indigo with sixty thousand *dinars* (said to be the amount of the reward promised originally) to the aged Firdawsi. But tradition relates that as the camels turned in at the Rudbar Gate, which is still standing, the remains of Persia's Homer were carried to a grave outside the city wall, the taint of unorthodoxy which had marred the success of his great work following him even after death, and preventing his burial in the public cemetery.

Firdawsi is one of the greatest poets of all ages, and in his immense epic he traces in majestic and vivid

language, the legendary history of Persia from the earliest ages up to the Arab Conquest. What the ordinary Persian of to-day knows of the history of his country is gathered from the *Shahnama*. To give an example of this, the writer was once told by an educated Persian that King Jamshid had instituted the Festival of No Ruz, her informant having no idea that he was speaking of a mythical personage.

The legends narrated in this poem were the common property of all Irani, and a prose "Book of Kings" had already been compiled in Persian, translated from the old Pahlavi epic of the Sasanian monarchs, and from it the poet took much of his material. His poem begins by relating how in prehistoric ages the Persians sprang from a nomad tribe who dwelt in the Elburz mountains and hunted wild animals to provide themselves with food and clothing. After a while they chose a king, Kaiumers by name, who was so wise that even the most savage beasts gave him homage, and his subjects would have prospered greatly under his rule if he had not had the misfortune to offend the King of the Demons, who reigned over the rich province of Mazanderán. This monarch sent a huge army of giants and monsters into Persia, destroyed the force headed by the son of Kaiumers and obliged that ruler himself to flee into hiding. But the demons did not have things all their own way, for there arose a deliverer for Iran in the person of the gallant Husheng, grandson of old Kaiumers. This youth called all the beasts of prey to fight under his standard, and instructing the birds of the air to peck out the eyes of his assailants, he succeeded in routing the enemy with great slaughter, and killed the King of the Demons

with his own hand. From this time Persia was safe from her foes, and her civilisation reached its climax during the long reign, lasting seven centuries, of great Jamshid, whom the Arab writers confuse with King Solomon on account of his extraordinary wisdom and power.

This Persian potentate founded the national spring festival, forced the *jinn*s to make splendid palaces for him, to build ships and launch them on the Caspian, and even to transport him through the air on his jewelled throne from one city to another.

His reign was a Golden Age for Persia, for no one ever got ill, or old, or died, and all were prosperous, and might be so still if Jamshid, inflated with pride, had not angered the gods by aspiring to divine honours. At once the kingdom was invaded by Zohak and his Arab hordes, and the Persians, seeing that Fortune had turned her face from their sovereign, gave their allegiance to the usurper, who slew their late ruler.

But they soon discovered what they had done in submitting to Zohak ; for their new king had two huge serpents growing from his shoulders, and these horrible creatures could only be appeased by feeding them with human blood. And now ensued centuries of misery for Iran, until the advent of a deliverer, Feridun by name, who is regarded by Persians as a symbol of justice and beneficence. It was revealed to Zohak in a dream that he would be shortly overthrown, and his diviners having informed him of the name of his future conqueror, then an infant, he pursued the young Feridun henceforth with such untiring zeal that the child could not have escaped from the death that



threatened him, had it not been for a good genius who sheltered him in the Elburz Mountains.

When Feridun was about sixteen the genius sent him splendidly armed and horsed into the capital of Zohak. As he entered the city he met Kavah, a blacksmith, who, frenzied with grief and rage because his two sons had been offered up to the demon serpents, was urging the populace to rise against the tyrant, and holding up his leather apron as the standard of revolt. As soon as the crowd saw the princely youth they felt sure that he must be Feridun, the prophesied deliverer, and they called upon him to lead them. This he accordingly did, and Zohak met with the reward of his crimes at last, and was bound with chains and immured in a cavern on the side of Mount Demavend, where the Persians say that his groans can sometimes be heard at the present day. The blacksmith's apron, covered with jewels, was used for centuries as the national standard of Iran, until captured by the Arabs when they conquered Persia.

On the death of Feridun the interest of the legends shifts from the kings, and centres in the hero Rustum, who becomes the national Champion, and with the aid of his celebrated steed Rakhsh upholds the throne of Persia for generations, and constantly comes to the rescue of its often incompetent occupants.

It is related that Rustum at the age of eight was as strong as the most powerful warrior in a kingdom of soldiers, and his first exploit was one that few grown men would have cared to perform. A great white elephant belonging to the king got loose one night and went about the city killing every one that it met. Rustum, being roused from sleep by the cries of the

townsfolk, seized his iron-headed mace, and rushing to the door of the castle, commanded the soldiers on guard to let him out. The men refused on account of his tender age ; thereupon he knocked a soldier down, broke the massive lock of the door, and made his way to the seat of the disturbance. The elephant on seeing the boy charged straight at him ; but Rustum delivered the animal such a mighty blow with his mace, that after staggering for a moment it fell down dead, and the grateful populace acclaimed the lad as the Champion of Persia.

Not long after this Afrasiyab, King of Tartary, invaded Persia with a vast army, and naturally Rustum was singled out to be one of the generals on the Persian side, but before he could go to his post he had the difficult task of finding a horse up to his great weight. He spent some days wandering about the grassy uplands of Khorasan in search of a steed, and at last his eye fell upon a splendid roan foal following a mare. The men in charge of the horses warned the lad not to go near it, because its mother killed all who approached her offspring, which had demon blood in its veins. These warnings, however, only stimulated the hero, who promptly caught the foal with his lasso, and when the mare rushed at him open-mouthed, he felled her to the earth with one blow of his fist. And then ensued a wild struggle between the maddened foal and its future master, in which Rustum gained the day and a marvellous steed about which the Persians tell almost as many tales as about the hero himself.

In the great battle which shortly ensued between the hosts of Iran and Tartary, such was the prowess of Rustum that the Tartar army was broken up and fled

in confusion across the Persian border, after which Iran had peace for many years.

But when foolish King Kai Kaus ascended the throne of Persia he was so ill-advised as to invade the fertile province of Mazanderan, which was known to be the chosen haunt of the race of demons.

Zal and Rustum were left in charge of the kingdom, and the monarch led his soldiers into the hostile country, where the great White Demon and his myrmidons caused darkness to envelope the Persian army and such huge hailstones to fall that many of the soldiers were killed, the rest with their king being taken captive and deprived of their sight.

When news of this terrible disaster reached Persia Rustum, without a moment's hesitation, saddled his horse Rakhsh and rode off quite alone to free his sovereign, the adventures which befell him on this quest being perhaps the most famous in Persian legend, and reminding the reader of the labours of Hercules.

On the first night of his journey Rustum was aroused by a great noise, and found that Rakhsh had been attacked by a huge lion, which, however, the noble horse had killed; but the hero was angry with his faithful companion for having run such a risk alone, and commanded it to awake him in the future if danger threatened. A few nights later a monstrous serpent crept from its lair, and approached the warrior, but when Rakhsh neighed loudly the creature disappeared and Rustum saw nothing. The same thing happened as soon as the Champion had composed himself to sleep again, and this time he was much annoyed at being aroused, as he imagined, without need, and he actually threatened to kill his horse if such a thing

occurred again. Just before dawn the monster made its third appearance, and Rakhsh, neighing, rushed at it with teeth and hoofs, while Rustum, springing to his feet, joined in the fight and slew the serpent.

One evening in the wooded country of Mazanderan the hero and his steed found food laid out at their halting-place, and they were eating and drinking their fill with delight when a fair lady made her appearance. Rustum, wondering whether he and his horse owed their meal to her kindness, handed her a goblet of ruby wine, invoking the blessing of the gods upon it as he did so, and was horrified to see her turn into a jet-black demon before his eyes. He at once slew the apparition, and realising that he had entered the haunted country of Mazanderan, he was not altogether surprised that he and Rakhsh had next to make their way through a region where it was dark during the day as well as the night.

At last, however, he reached the capital of Mazanderan, and at his approach the demon warriors guarding the city gates fled to the mountains, and the hero liberated his countrymen. The king, his nobility, and thousands of soldiers emerged from their dungeons into the daylight, but what was the horror of their rescuer to perceive that one and all were stone blind. Legend relates that the invincible Champion lifted up his voice and wept that his toils had been all in vain, for of what use to Persia would a blind monarch and a sightless army be?

But when King Kai Kaus explained to his deliverer that all could recover their sight if they could bathe their eyes in the blood of the *Div-i-Safid*, or great White Demon, Rustum took heart again, and sallied

off to accomplish what is considered to be the greatest exploit of his career.

He tracked the monster to its den in the mountains, and at last found it asleep in its cave—a terrible creature, covered from head to foot with white hair. When roused it issued forth, attended by a crowd of lesser demons, and, brandishing an enormous millstone above its head, it promptly threw it at Rustum. Luckily, this powerful missile fell short of its aim, and in another second hero and demon were struggling together in a life-and-death combat, the like of which had never been waged since the world began. Again and again first one and then the other got the mastery, and both became exhausted from severe wounds. In fact, Rustum was getting the worst of it when the gods vouchsafed him a miraculous accession of strength, and in a last despairing effort he hurled the demon on to the rocky floor of its cavern with such terrific force that it expired, rending the air with its yells.

The hundreds of little demons that had watched the conflict with keen interest, shrivelled up and died at the moment of their master's decease, and Rustum, collecting some of the blood of his foe in his helmet, returned to the Persians and restored their sight with the horrible fluid. Thus ended the celebrated *Heft Khan*, or "Seven Stages" of Rustum, the Knight-Errant of Persia.

After this Iran was at peace for a time, and her hero, having nothing particular to do, spent his days in hunting the fleet wild ass of the desert. On one of these expeditions he came to a little kingdom on the border of Khorasan, and fell in love with, and married, the princess.

Rustum, however, was not the kind of man to care to

be long at ease, and after some months he left his fair wife. But before they parted he gave her a talisman, telling her to bind it round the arm of her child if the gods should grant them a son, and to send him news if such an event should occur.

In due course a splendid boy was born to Tamineh, who, fearing that her child might be taken from her should her husband know the truth, sent a trusty slave to inform him that he was the father of a daughter.

The young Sohrab grew up full of pride at being the son of the great Champion, and when he was hardly more than a boy he sallied out into the world, mounted on a steed of the race of Rakhsh, and announcing that he intended to conquer Persia and place Rustum on the throne.

Afrasiyab, king of Tartary, Persia's deadliest enemy, heard of the young hero, and wishing to gain such an asset for his side, persuaded him to join his army in an invasion of Persia. As of course the sovereign had no intention of handing Iran over to Rustum should he conquer the country, he told the generals of his army that they must be careful not to let Sohrab know which of the Persian warriors was his mighty father, hoping that the two Champions might engage in mortal combat and kill one another, thus leaving him free to seize Persia.

King Kai Kaus had treated Rustum with base ingratitude of late years, having apparently forgotten how the hero had delivered him from the White Demon. He almost ignored the great warrior when he came to court ; but Rustum made no complaint, and lived in retirement in his province of Sistan. Yet, true patriot that he was, when the news of Persia's danger reached him, he lost

no time in setting forth to the help of his sovereign. When he arrived at the Persian camp and heard on all sides highly-coloured accounts of the prowess of the young Tartar Champion, it is said that he wondered whether Tamineh could have deceived him and whether this wonderful Sohrab might not be in truth his own son. Sôhrab, on his side, was anxious to have Rustum's tent pointed out to him, and commanded a captured Persian soldier to do so ; but the man, fearing from the youth's eagerness that he intended to slay the Champion by treachery, replied that the latter had not yet arrived from Zabulistan.

On the next day the Persian and Tartar hosts fully armed stood opposite to one another waiting for the battle to commence, when suddenly Sohrab stepped out into the open space between the armies and loudly challenged the king Kai Kaus to single combat. A shudder ran through the Persians, for every man knew that their sovereign, caring only for luxury, did not excel in feats of arms, and a murmur went up that all would be lost unless Rustum came to the rescue. Messengers ran in haste to the tent where he lay, telling him that not a single Persian warrior dared to face young Sohrab, and thereupon the warrior, donning his suit of black mail, and telling the Persians that he wished to keep his name a secret from the Tartars, issued forth and met his opponent.

As soon as he set eyes on the boy he was touched with pity on account of his youth, and urged him to give up the combat. "I will yield to no man save to Rustum," was the answer. "Are you by any happy chance that mighty hero?"

But the Champion only replied that he was but as a

servant to the man who would never deign to fight with a mere child ; and, stung by this taunt, Sohrab rushed angrily at his unknown father, and the fight began.

So fierce was the encounter that both bled from many grievous wounds, and having bent their spears and swords and broken their clubs and bows, they began to wrestle, but as neither could get the advantage of the other, and as sunset was approaching, they agreed to continue their combat on the next day.

On the morrow, when the Champions met face to face, Sohrab felt such a strong affection for his adversary, that he begged him to become his friend. Rustum, however, firmly declined his overtures, and soon they were locked together in a deadly wrestle, during which Sohrab got his foe beneath him, and was about to despatch him when Rustum called out that it was against Persian custom to kill an enemy until he had bitten the ground twice. With a magnanimity which his father was far from sharing, the youth suffered his adversary to rise, and it was decided to conclude the fight on the morrow.

The Tartars were furious with Sohrab for having allowed his enemy to escape when he had him in his power, and Rustum himself felt that night that in all probability he would be with the gods on the morrow, for he clearly saw that age had robbed him of much of his former strength and quickness. In his extremity he prayed to the dwellers above, and his prayer was answered, for when he met his foe the next day he felt himself endowed with miraculous power.

With a cry of gratitude he fell upon his opponent, and though the wrestlers appeared evenly matched for a



space, yet Sohrab's grip grew weaker as time went by, and Rustum, putting forth all his force in one great effort, hurled the youth to the ground, and instantly drove a dagger into his side.

The air was rent with Persian shouts of joy and Tartar yells of grief; but the old hero noted none of these things, for he heard his adversary gasp out that he had invaded Persia in order to find Rustum, his father, who would assuredly avenge the death of his son.

In an agony the Persian Champion asked Sohrab whether he possessed any token to prove that he was really the son of Rustum, and the dying youth begged him to strip off his coat of mail and he would find the talisman given years before to Princess Tamineh.

When Rustum saw the amulet he knew that his son lay before him, and in his remorse he would have killed himself if Sohrab had not besought him to live and continue to defend Persia. The youth then begged his father to allow the Tartar army to depart unscathed; and having drawn the dagger from his side, he breathed his last, Rustum lying on the ground sobbing terribly, and Rakhsh, according to the legend, weeping with the voice of a man.

As Matthew Arnold puts it in his fine poem<sup>1</sup>—

“So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead;  
And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak  
Down o'er his face, and sat by his dead son.  
As those black granite pillars, once high rear'd  
By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear  
His house, now 'mid their broken flights of steps  
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—  
So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.”

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<sup>1</sup> “Sohrab and Rustum.”

It is sad to relate that the end of the great Champion of Persia was compassed by treachery and by his own brother Shughad, who had always been jealous of his renown.

The legend tells that this unnatural brother laid a plot with the King of Kabul, who invited Rustum to hunt with him. At a certain part of the road this monarch arranged a series of pits, which he ordered to be stuck full of swords and knives with the points upwards, and lightly covered over with earth. When they came near the fatal spot the king requested his guest to precede him ; but Rakhsh, snorting with terror, refused to move until beaten severely by his irate master, who, in spite of generations of experience of his steed's wisdom, never trusted to the faithful animal's instincts. On this occasion Rakhsh started forward with the pain, and fell into the death-trap, struggling out only to fall into another and yet another, until at last both horse and rider lay dying from their wounds, their murderers watching them with fiendish glee. Rustum asked his brother as a last favour to hand him his bow and arrows in order to keep off the beasts of prey that would attack them at night-fall ; and as soon as he had possessed himself of the weapon, he drew the bow with an expiring effort and shot the treacherous Shughad through the heart. Thereupon he fell back dead, and his noble steed breathed its last at the same moment, an unworthy ending to the lives of the greatest and longest-lived warrior and horse in legend.

With the death of mighty Rustum the mythical Kaiani dynasty nears its end, and we now come to historical facts much embroidered with fiction.

Alexander the Great, for example, actually figures as

a Persian hero, in order to appease the vanity of those whom he conquered. According to the *Shahnama* his mother was the daughter of Philip of Macedon, and was married to Darius; but was divorced by that monarch and sent back to Macedonia, where her son, the rightful heir to the Persian throne, was born. Thus when later on Alexander led his armies into Persia, he was really fired with the laudable desire to wrest his lawful inheritance from Darius the Second, his half-brother!

Firdawsi touches upon the Parthian period very lightly in his great epic, the Persians looking upon this dynasty as rude and uncultured. He then enters upon what to Iranians was the Golden Age of Sasanian rule, and finishes his poem with the Arab conquest of Persia, in the account of which he is careful to omit anything injurious to Mohammedan pride. Throughout this period he is on historical ground, though he inserts much romantic fiction, Ardeshir, the first Sasanian monarch's conquest of Kerman, being poetically described as an encounter between the king and a huge worm (*kirm*) or dragon.

The writer has spoken somewhat fully of this legendary history of Persia, because it forms a part of the life of the people in a way hardly to be understood by more highly educated nations. Rustum and his exploits; Jamshid possessor of power over genii; Feridun the Just, and foolish Kai Kaus are all real personages to the ordinary Persian, who delights to listen to a recitation from the *Shahnama*, and to feel his heart expand as he hears of the bygone glories of Iran.

Although Firdawsi is the only poet whom we have mentioned, yet during his lifetime and later there was a

great outburst of literary genius, spoken of by Professor Browne<sup>1</sup> as the "Ghaznawi Period," from the fact that it centred in Ghazna, where it received encouragement from Sultan Mahmud, that great patron of letters. The famous doctor and philosopher, Abu Ali ibn Sina, known as Avicenna, whose writings so largely influenced Europe during the Middle Ages, is perhaps chief among many celebrated authors, and the poet Nizami, who flourished about a century after Firdawsi and wrote the *Sikandarnama* or "Book of Alexander," is still widely read.

In the eleventh century Nishapur was famous for its learning and its commerce, both of which were fostered by the Nizam-ul-Mulk, a native of Tus, who was vizier to the Seljuk monarchs Alp Arslam and Malik Shah. This minister had such a love of learning that he was said to have given a tenth of his income annually to found and endow colleges, Nishapur and Isfahan, among other cities, profiting by his bounty. It is melancholy to think that the former town, the birthplace, residence, and grave of Omar, and once one of the richest and largest towns in Persia, is now merely a collection of mud-built houses with no traces of past splendour. About A.D. 1153 it was devastated by the Turkomans, who burnt and destroyed it to such an extent that when the inhabitants ventured to return they found only a heap of ruins. Less than a century later the Mongol hordes swept into Khorasan, and not only was Nishapur again demolished, but the unfortunate townsfolk were massacred. Since then Turkomans, Uzbeks, and Afghans have done their best to prevent the town regaining its former prosperity—in fact, it is doubtful

<sup>1</sup> "Literary History of Persia."

whether the inhabitants of the district would have dared to return had it not been for the extreme fertility of the soil.

Here the astronomer-poet, Omar Khayyam, was born, probably about 1040, and curiously enough his reputation in Persia rests on his achievements in astronomy and mathematics, educated Persians being surprised when informed that in England he is admired perhaps above all their poets, and that societies exist for the study of his quatrains. In the oldest "Lives of the Persian Poets" that has come down to us, written about A.D. 1200, there is no mention of Omar Khayyam, who owes his European and American fame to Fitzgerald's superb translation of his *rubā'is*, all of which cannot, however, with certainty be attributed to him.

The information that we possess about the man whose very name carries a fascination to the Western world is but scanty. We hear that his father was probably a tent-maker, but that Omar was given the best education that the age afforded. He was well versed in the Koran, in Arabic, astronomy, and philosophy, and after a time spent at Merv, famous for its library, took up his residence at Nishapur, where he taught at the college, and was treated with high honour by Malik Shah. His knowledge of medicine caused him to be called in to prescribe when the little prince Sanjar was ill, and his pre-eminence in astronomy placed him on the committee of eight who were entrusted by Malik Shah with the reform of the Calendar.

Omar Khayyam left behind him works on Euclid, algebra, metaphysics, and natural science, and had some reputation in his day as a poet, one of the quatrains

which he composed at odd times being quoted by a later writer. As to religion, he was a disciple of great Avicenna, and was fiercely attacked on account of his reputation as a free-thinker and an atheist.

He was also credited with a gift of foretelling the future, and this is brought out by one of his pupils, who writes that the master prophesied that his tomb would be hidden twice a year by the falling blossoms of fruit trees. This was regarded at the time as idle talk, but when Omar's follower visited the grave several years later and found the spot buried under the petals of peach and pear, he states that the prediction returned to his mind and that he wept the loss of his master, "that proof of the Truth," as he calls him. Omar's grave is still to be seen at Nishapur, but Major Sykes<sup>\*</sup> writes that the remains of the poet are not permitted to rest within the shrine because he was a Sunni. His uninscribed plaster tomb is in an alcove open to the air, and perchance the spring winds carry falling blossoms to it.

In every notice that we have of Omar he is called "the wise," "one of the most learned men in Khorasan," or "versed in all sciences," but nearly all speak with reprobation of his religious views, which one writer stigmatises as "corrupt and shameless." And yet when he died, about A.D. 1123, his passing might have been an example to those who denounced him. It is related that he was reading the works of Avicenna when he felt the approach of death, and, slipping his gold toothpick between the parchment leaves, he summoned his friends to hear his last words. When they were assembled he

<sup>\*</sup> "Pilgrimage to the Tomb of Omar Khayyam" (*Travel and Exploration*, September, 1909).

performed the evening prayer, and then said, as he bowed his forehead to the ground, "O God! truly I have endeavoured to know Thee according to the limit of my powers, therefore forgive me, for indeed the little knowledge of Thee that I possess is my only means of approach to Thee." With these words his soul passed from among those present, who were left in much grief.

It is close upon eight centuries since Omar Khayyam passed away, and yet his thoughts on life and death are fresh as if he had written in our own generation, and to many his doubts are as insoluble. It is a great soul, athirst for a knowledge of God, and a passionate seeker after truth, that reveals itself to us, and in spite of difficulties and contradictions in his utterances, he appeals strongly to those who care for the spiritual more than for the material.

It must be remembered that in the *Ruba'iyat* each quatrain is complete in itself, and as these verses were written at different times and in different moods, they do not link on to one another to form a connected poem.

## LXVI.

"I sent my soul through the Invisible,  
Some letter of that after-life to spell :  
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,  
And answer'd, 'I myself am Heav'n and Hell.'"

## LXVIII.

"We are no other than a moving row  
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go  
Round with the sun-illumined Lantern held  
In Midnight by the Master of the Show ;"

C.

"Yon rising Moon that looks for us again—  
How oft hereafter will she wax and wane ;  
How oft hereafter rising look for us  
Through this same Garden—and for *one* in vain !"

CI.

"And when like her, O Saki, you shall pass  
Among the Guests Star-scattered on the grass,  
And in your joyous errand reach the spot  
Where I made One—turn down an empty Glass !"<sup>\*</sup>

Early in the thirteenth century Persia was invaded by the Mongols under Chinghiz Khan, who overran Asia, and even carried death and destruction as far as Germany. A blow was dealt to Persian civilisation from which it never recovered ; and it is horrible to read how these barbarians reduced Tus, the native city of Firdawsi, to a mass of ruins, and how they destroyed Nishapur, actually building the heads of the slain into pyramids. Men, women, and children were massacred in cold blood when the Mongols took a city, priceless manuscripts were burnt, the shrines despoiled of their treasures, and flourishing lands were turned into deserts. Fortunately the successors of Hulagu Khan embraced Islam, and henceforth matters were far easier for the conquered Persians ; in fact, the great poet Saadi of Shiraz is contemporary with the Mongol invasion. The Persians class this poet with Firdawsi and Anwari (the latter little known to European fame), calling them the "Three Prophets of Poetry."

Saadi, whose real name is Musharrifu'd-Din, was born at Shiraz about 1184, and died there at a great age in

<sup>\*</sup> Fitzgerald's translation.



1291. Left an orphan in early youth, Saadi spent the student period of his life at Baghdad, the capital of the Khalifs and the seat of learning of the Mohammedan world, and while there made his first pilgrimage to Mecca. According to his biographers Saadi visited the sacred city no less than fourteen times in his long life, and always made the journey on foot. Even when a student at Baghdad, the fever of travel had seized upon him, for we read that he journeyed to Kashgar, the inhabitants of which far-off city received him well, having already heard of his literary fame.

When his education was completed the poet started off on many years of travel, during the course of which he visited India, Syria, Arabia, and Asia Minor, among other countries, embodying many of his experiences in his poems.

On one occasion he was captured by the Crusaders and made to dig in the trenches before Tripoli. He was, however, ransomed by a rich compatriot of Aleppo, who gave him his daughter in marriage, together with a dowry of a hundred *dinars*. The lady turned out a shrew, and according to the *Gulistan* made the poet's life a burden to him, saying on one occasion, "Are you not the man that my father bought from the Feringhis for ten *dinars*?" "It is true," was the reply of Saadi; "he ransomed me for ten *dinars* and then sold me into slavery to you for a hundred."

Towards the end of his life Saadi built himself a hermitage outside the walls of Shiraz on the spot where his tomb now stands, and here he was visited by the noblest in the kingdom, who delighted to give him rich gifts. Of these he kept but little for himself and bestowed the rest on the poor, thus practising that

liberality which he inculcates so frequently in his writings.

The tomb of Saadi is a humble one in a neglected enclosure, and no admirers are buried round him as is the case with his brilliant compatriot Hafiz, the reason being that the author of the *Gulistan* and the *Bustan* is suspected of having been a Sunni. Such religious views are an unpardonable offence in Persia, the stronghold of the Shiah faith—in fact, a high priest of Shiraz, in a fit of fanaticism, actually destroyed the monument first erected over the poet's grave. On his headstone is carved the same Arabic inscription that is on the tomb of Hafiz: "He [*i.e.*, Allah] is everlasting, and everything else passes away," and there is also a quotation from the *Bustan*.

The *Bustan* (the Orchard) and the *Gulistan* (the Rose Garden) are considered Saadi's masterpieces, the former being a poem and the latter a mass of prose anecdotes, interspersed with verses. Besides several other works the poet is justly celebrated for his *ghazals*, or odes, in which he is only rivalled by his great fellow-townsmen Hafiz.

Here are a few lines from one admired by all Shirazis:—

"O joyous and gay is the New Year's Day, and in Shiraz most  
of all;  
Even the stranger forgets his home and becomes its willing  
thrall.  
O'er the garden's Egypt, Joseph-like, the fair red rose is king  
And the Zephyr, e'en to the heart of the town, doth the scent of  
his raiment bring." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Professor E. G. Browne.

The *Gulistan* is a collection of stories and precepts inculcating lessons of morality, policy, and *savoir vivre*; its reflections are often profound, and the many stories are told in a piquant and sometimes epigrammatic style, the whole work being interspersed with verses that give it variety. In this mine of worldly-wisdom the moralist, the man of the world, and even the corrupt can find matter to their taste. It is not too much to say that, next to the Koran, the works of Saadi are the chief moral guide of his countrymen, and the traveller, if he have any intercourse with educated Persians of almost any class, will not be long in conversation with them before he hears the familiar *Sa'adi guft* (Saadi says). There is indeed much of wisdom and truth to be found in the poet's works, written in an elegant style and with an exquisite choice of language. Yet though a young man, thoroughly imbued with the precepts of the sage of Shiraz, would probably make a success of his life in a worldly way, yet he might run some risk of losing his own soul in the process. The poet writes in a manly spirit, loves tolerance, has an abhorrence of religious hypocrisy, and enjoins contentment and abstinence, yet his maxims would be apt to stifle any generous impulse of pity towards and trust in mankind.

The following pretty conceit from the *Gulistan* shows only one side of the character of the shrewd dervish with his plentiful supply of mother-wit:—

“A perfumed bit of clay came to my hand one day when I was in the bath, and I inquired, ‘Art thou musk or ambergris, because thy delicious odour intoxicates me?’ It replied, ‘I was formerly a mere lump of clay, but I have been in the company of the rose.’”

Of course, the standard of morality is not the same for the East as for the West, and we must remember that "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" is the law of Islam, there being no room for forgiveness of injuries in its code. This the following story shows :—

"A soldier hit a pious man with a stone, but the dervish, being unable to avenge himself, bided his time and kept the stone. After awhile the soldier offended the king, who punished him by imprisoning him in a well, whereupon the dervish appeared, leant over and dropped the stone on his former enemy's head." Saadi goes on to draw the moral that it is unwise to contend with a wicked man when he is in power, but "wait till fortune renders him feeble, and then pick out his brains."

There is also the story of King Hormuzd, who imprisoned his father's ministers, and when asked what fault they had committed replied that they had done nothing wrong, but he perceived that they were afraid of their sovereign, and he imagined that this fear might urge them to take his life. "Dread him who dreads thee, O wise man! Seest thou not when the cat becomes desperate how he plucks out with his claws the eyes of a tiger? The viper bites the shepherd's bare foot because it fears that he will crush in its head with a stone."

And, again there is the tale of the youth who was instructed by a famous wrestler in all his tricks save one. The ungrateful stripling boasted to the king that he was as good a man, if not better, than his master, and the monarch accordingly ordered a trial of strength between the two. The veteran immediately threw his pupil by the aid of the trick that he had kept in reserve,

and remarked that he had not taught it to the youth because he remembered the saying of the wise that it was folly to give so much strength to a friend that if he became a foe he would have the power to injure.

Moreover, Saadi's regard for truth was not very strong, for in the first anecdote in the *Gulistan* the moral is inculcated that "A lie that results in good is better than a truth that brings trouble." These extracts are perhaps sufficient to show that the poet's message to his countrymen is that of a man of the world, not troubled with too many scruples, full of common sense, and anxious to stand well with the authorities both in this life and the next.

The great poet Hafiz, really Shemseddin Mohammed by name, his sobriquet being given him from the fact that he had taken the theological degree of *Hafiz*, was born at Shiraz, probably in the early part of the fourteenth century. We first hear of him as being poet-laureate and in high favour at the court of Sultan Shah Mesoud, the Governor or Satrap of Fars, which province had Shiraz for its capital.

This city, beautifully situated on a plain surrounded by mountains, is dear to the heart of every Persian, for Fars is the cradle of his race, and her capital, besides being his idea of an earthly paradise, has produced two of the greatest poets of Iran. Although Shiraz suffered from various changes of dynasty during the lifetime of Hafiz, yet it does not appear that they made any difference in the material circumstances of the poet, each ruler in his turn feeling proud of being the patron of the great lyricist.

Fars, in common with the rest of the empire, had

formed part of the realms of the Khalifate up to the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258, after which date it was ruled over by the dynasty founded by Hulagu Khan. As the later Sultans of this Mongol dynasty became effete, Persia was split up into numberless small kingdoms, over which satraps ruled with supreme power, and this state of affairs continued until the conquest of Timur the Lame at the end of the fourteenth century.

There is a tradition that when the rough Tartar entered Shiraz in 1393 he summoned the poet into his presence and demanded of him how he had dared to say in one of his lyrics that he would gladly give the conqueror's cities of Bokhara and Samarkand in exchange for the mole on the cheek of his beloved.

"So but that Turk of Shiraz take my heart within her hand  
of snow,  
Bokhara, ay, and Samarcand, on her black mole will I bestow."<sup>1</sup>

It is said that Hafiz answered that such lavishness on his part had brought him to his present poverty, and the Tartar, laughing at the readiness of the reply, took him into favour.

In those days a man of letters depended entirely upon the munificence of his patron, and it says much for the estimation in which learning was held that even when a robber-chieftain, such as the founder of the Muzafferi dynasty, seized the province, he immediately reinstated the poet in his office.

Hafiz loved his native city passionately, only leaving her some three or four times during the course of his

<sup>1</sup> viii. 1, J. Payne's translation.

long life, although sovereigns from other parts of Persia, from Baghdad, and even from India offered him great rewards if he would reside at their courts.

In one of his odes he mentioned her famous stream and pleasure-garden in these words :—

“Give cupbearer the wine that's left ; for thou'lt not find in  
Paradise  
The banks of Ruknabad, nor yet Musella's rosegarths all  
a-blow.”<sup>1</sup>

And, indeed, he had some reason for his predilection, as the reader will see from the following quotation :<sup>2</sup>—

“We were now at that point known to all students of Hafiz, called ‘Tang-i-Allahu Akbar,’ because whoever first beholds Shiraz hence is constrained by the exceeding beauty of the sight to cry out in admiration ‘Allahu Akbar’—‘God is most great!’ At our very feet in a grassy, fertile plain, girt with purple hills (on the loftier summits of which the snow still lingered) and half concealed amidst gardens of dark stately cypresses, wherein the rose and the judas-tree in luxuriant abundance struggled with a host of other flowers for the mastery of colour, sweet and beautiful in its garb of spring verdure which clothed the very roofs of the bazaars, studded with many a slender minaret, and many a turquoise-hued dome, lay the home of Persian culture, the mother of Persian genius, the sanctuary of poetry and philosophy, Shiraz.”

Like Omar Khayyam, the lyrist was regarded as unorthodox by the “unco’ guid” of his day, and at his death these latter did their utmost to prevent his burial with Mohammedan rites. According to tradition his friends proposed to settle the dispute by drawing a lot from a mass of his couplets written on slips and shaken

<sup>1</sup> viii. 2, J. Payne's translation.

<sup>2</sup> “A Year among the Persians,” Professor E. G. Browne.

up in an urn, and their opponents agreeing to this, a child is said to have picked out the following lines at random :—

“Withhold not the foot from the funeral of Hafiz ;  
For though he be drowned in sin, he fareth to Heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

This, of course, settled the matter, and the poet was carried to his grave in peace. In spite of severe opposition from the orthodox, who represented their famous fellow-citizen as an enemy to the Faith, and a man of immoral life, his poems spread speedily throughout Persia, India, and Turkey—in fact, wherever the Persian language was read or spoken.

Hafiz was an epicurean, a man who snatched what pleasure he could from the passing hour, who enjoyed wine, women, and music, and rejoiced in the beauties of Nature. As regards religion, he appears to have been a tolerant man of the world with no particular bias to any creed.

He is looked upon by some as a master in the art of pleasure, and by others as a saint, these latter opening the works of the poet at random with an invocation when they practise divination. Moreover, the Sufis who opposed him so fiercely during his lifetime actually pretended after his death that he was in reality one of their number, and that his constant allusions to the joys of love and wine were meant to be taken in a spiritual sense. This, however, will not be the view of the ordinary unbiassed reader, who will look upon the poet as the reverse of a mystic ; and the following couplets from one of his odes are characteristic as showing his fondness for Nature, wine, love, and music :—

<sup>1</sup> J. Payne's translation.



## CXXI.

1. "Now that the rose in the meads To life is returned from  
the dead,  
The violet prone at her feet Layeth in homage its head."
3. "Sit never in rose-time without Beloved and ghittern and  
wine,  
For a week, like the season of life, Is the time of the  
roses red." <sup>2</sup>

The handsome tomb of Hafiz at Shiraz, planted round with tall cypresses, is constantly visited by all classes, the pleasure-seekers coming to pay homage to a master who understood the *joie de vivre*, and who loved art for art's sake; while the religious look upon the poet as a mystic, whose most apparently material utterances have an esoteric meaning for the elect. Hafiz has thus the somewhat remarkable fate of being adored by both saints and sinners after his death, and his tomb is surrounded by the graves of countless admirers.

Two among the various inscriptions on his tombstone show these different points of view:—

"When thou passest by my tombstone, call down a blessing,  
For the libertines of the whole world will resort to it in  
pilgrimage."

And in contrast to this sentiment is the following inscription:—

"That Lamp of the mystics, Master Hafiz,  
(Who was a candle of the Divine Light, since he sought a  
resting-place in the Earth of Musalla),  
Look for his date from the Earth of Musalla."

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<sup>2</sup> J. Payne's translation.

Only the first and fourth of these lines are actually inscribed on the tomb, but it is interesting to see how in these inscriptions the man of pleasure and the mystic both claim the poet for their own.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A SLIGHT ACCOUNT OF THE ARTS AND CRAFTS OF PERSIA

THE Persians have always been an artistic people, and the fine ruins of Persepolis, the great arch of Ctesiphon, and the bas-reliefs of Bisitun and Naksh-i-Rustum testify to their genius for architecture and sculpture during the Achæmenian and Sasanian dynasties. Although the Mohammedan religion forbade presentments of living things as contrary to the Koran, yet the noble mosques and shrines that adorn the principal cities, and not a few of the palaces and houses, prove that the Persians have not lost their sense of beauty.

The traveller passing through the district round the Caspian will notice the carved and fretted woodwork ornamenting the better-class dwelling-places, which have many a quaint balcony and verandah; and throughout the Persian Plateau he will admire the skilful use made of plaster, ordinary-looking houses being beautified with stucco façades and imposing-looking loggias supported on columns. Inside, the principal room will probably have an enormous window made of stained glass set in small leaded squares, the effect of the light streaming through and steeping the room

in soft colours being very beautiful. It must, however, be confessed that such a window is a dubious advantage during the winter, because, no putty being used, all the winds of heaven seem to blow freely between the countless panes.

A characteristic decoration of a house is to mould the ceilings in the honeycomb pattern, sticking hundreds of tiny pieces of mirror-work into the plaster when wet, the effect being quite fairy-like when the sun flashes upon the facets. Tiles are used extensively in decoration, also bricks glazed in several colours, and an effective mosaic. It is probably this latter that is mentioned in the Book of Esther, where at the palace of Artaxerxes at Shushan the people feasted in the courtyard "upon a pavement of red and blue and white and black marble."<sup>1</sup>

The domes and façades of all important mosques and shrines, some of the Shah's palaces, many gateways, and occasionally the vaulted roofs of the bazaars, are decorated with glazed tiles or bricks principally coloured in blues, greens, and yellows, relieved with black and white; and in the clear atmosphere of Iran they give a touch of splendour to the scene.

But at the present day nothing has been produced in any way comparable to the superb enamelled tiles found in the palace of Darius at Susa,<sup>2</sup> baked five hundred years before our era, and showing an artistic genius in the portrayal of the figures of the archers and the sinuous bodies of the great lions of the frieze. Then ensues a long blank until we come to the beautiful twelfth- and thirteenth-century tile work, which degene-

<sup>1</sup> Book of Esther.

<sup>2</sup> "La Perse, la Chaldée et la Susiane." Dieulafoy.

rated, and is hardly worthy of mention after the death of Shah Abbas in the seventeenth century. These *kashi* (tiles), as they are called, indicating that the art took its rise in the city of Kashan, are still the glory of many mosques and shrines. Perhaps the most beautiful are those that go by the name of lustre or *reflet*. The glaze with which they were covered is now a lost art, and was mixed with gold or some other metal which gave it a peculiar iridescence.

Sir Murdoch Smith<sup>1</sup> considers that lustre ware was made in Persia certainly six hundred, and possibly two thousand, years ago. As a rule these tiles have a pattern in rich brown on a white background, or *vice versa*, the usually conventional designs being outlined with great delicacy. In one large plaque from the ruins of old Kerman, now in Major Sykes' collection, the great purple Arabic letters, raised half an inch, are entwined with leaves of turquoise blue. Neither letter nor leaf is iridescent, but stands boldly out from a white and brown lustre background.

Other *kashi* in the same collection come from north-east Persia, and are magnificent in their blues relieved by white and gold, and bear the date A.D. 1444. Their design is identical with the tiles that adorn Timur the Lame's famous mosque at Samarkand, and which were made by men of Kum.

The exquisite lustre ware used for *objets de luxe* is now hard to find, most of what we see in museums having been exhumed from the ruins of Rhé (the ancient Rhages). One of the best specimens ever seen by the writer is in a hall of the Alhambra, and is a great two-handled vase, adorned with gazelles; the

<sup>1</sup> "Persian Art."

prevailing colours are blue and purple and the animals are outlined in golden brown on a white background. This vase, and its pair in the Madrid Museum, were made in Spain, and show how Persians influenced art under the Moorish occupation of that country.

Early in the seventeenth century Shah Abbas imported Chinese workmen into his country to teach his subjects the art of making porcelain, and the Chinese influence is very strong in the designs on this ware. Chinese marks also were copied, so that to scratch an article is sometimes the only means of proving it to be of Persian manufacture, for the Chinese glaze, hard as iron, will take no mark.

At the present day many of the old arts have died out, probably from lack of patronage; in fact, practically every fine building, bridge, or public work is popularly said to date from the time of Shah Abbas. Though of course this is an exaggeration, yet little has been done to improve the country and encourage its arts since the extinction of the Sefavi dynasty.

The handsome *repoussé* silver-work of Shiraz and the delicate incising on silver, characteristic of Isfahan, are still much practised in Persia. Graceful bowls and ewers for rose-water, jugs and lamps of brass have a lavish wealth of design which, however, does not equal the old work to be picked up in the country. The same also applies to the decorative modern damascened work of gold beaten into steel, and also to the richly adorned *kalian* tops; for the translucent green and blue enamel and the wonderful groups of figures on small enamel plaques are seldom seen nowadays.

The beautiful inlaid work of ivory, mother of pearl, and metal on wood is still carried to such a pitch of

perfection that Mr. Benjamin<sup>1</sup> counted four hundred and twenty-eight distinct pieces on a square inch of this work. Seal-cutting flourishes, for every one affixes his seal to a letter instead of signing his name ; and *papier maché* mirrors and pen boxes are still made. These latter cannot vie with the mellow tones of the old work, in which it is curious to see presentments of the Holy Family, copied from Italian pictures, and looking strangely out of place in a Mohammedan bazaar. Shah Abbas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries sent Persians to Italy to learn painting, and this is one of the results ; another being the Italianesque treatment of designs for carpets made at that period.

Fine writing must now be considered as practically a lost art, printing having largely replaced the calligraphy which was valued so highly in the old days that large sums would be given for a single line by a skilled writer ; but at the present time there is little demand for illuminated manuscript copies of Saadi and Hafiz.

As to textiles, velvet is made at Kashan, often with an effective pattern of cypresses and peacocks ; but it cannot be mentioned in the same breath with the old velvet, which has a colour and texture unknown to the modern.<sup>2</sup> The *specialité* of Resht are showy embroidered saddle coverings, differently coloured bits of material being *appliquéd* on to a cloth with braid and a variety of silk stitchings, the effect being good if somewhat garish. Kerman produces most elaborate embroideries on a fine woollen material, also splendid shawls, which are largely used for *kalats* or "coats of honour." These are presented by the Shah to a subject

<sup>1</sup> "Persia and the Persians."

he wishes to single out for distinction ; the courtiers wear them when in full dress, and they cover the bier of a rich man on its way to the grave. Yezd has a cypress-patterned silk material which is used for the same objects, and the traveller can purchase here marvellous "drawn-thread" work both in silk and cotton.

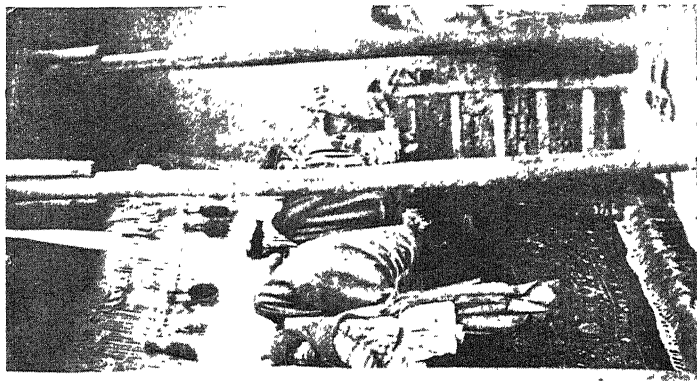
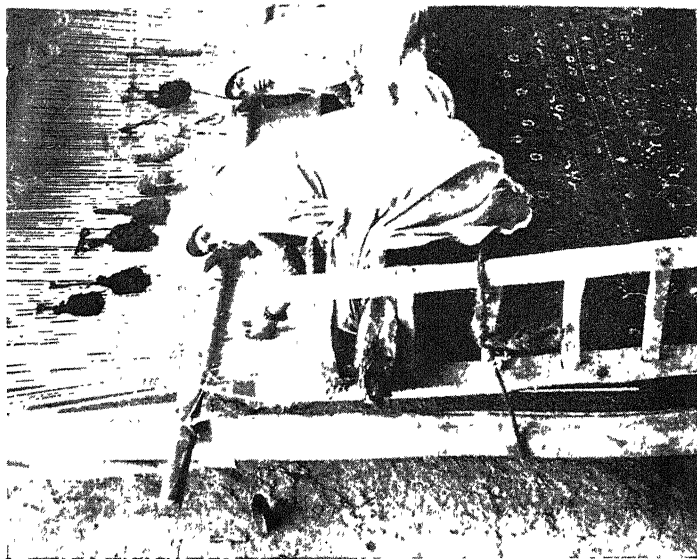
It must be understood that everything in the country is made by hand, there being no machinery, and this gives an individuality to all that is produced. In fact, it is never wise to put off buying an article in the belief that others like it are certain to be brought up later for sale, as in all probability it is unique.

Perhaps the art in which modern Persia chiefly excels is carpet-making, and there is hardly a visitor to the country who has not fallen under the spell of this beautiful industry.

There are twenty to thirty different centres where carpets are produced, Sultanabad being the chief ; and the towns of Kerman, Shiraz, Meshed, and Kermanshah, together with several nomad tribes, all weave these fabrics.

They are made on hand-looms, and in the factories the pattern is read out to the weavers, most of whom are children. "Two green and four black forward, three to be left for grounding, six blue," &c., calls out the *ustad* from the carefully drawn design he holds, or, more probably, from memory. The children answer him in their piping voices, "Two green and four black to place, have eaten six blue," and so on, as they deftly twist and knot the fine wool, only one strand of wool going to each stitch in contrast to the three strands of the far coarser Meshed carpets.





A PERSIAN CARPET FACTORY



Indigo and madder supply the chief of the imperishable dyes ; a deep orange-colour is produced from the skins of grapes and pomegranates, and cochineal is also used.

Sir George Birdwood<sup>1</sup> points out that carpets were primarily ritualistic, and that the "trees of life," the conventionalised animals, the "knop and flower" pattern, and the various scrolls and chevrons to be seen in the Persian carpet of to-day may all be traced back to their remote origin in Mesopotamia, probably over two thousand years before the Christian era.

As the carpets produced at Kerman and those woven by the Tekké Turkomans are unrivalled for colour, fineness of pile, and beauty of design, and as they are totally dissimilar in appearance, a slight description of their characteristics may be of interest.

The Kerman carpets are extremely fine in texture, and it is said that the wool of which they are made owes its special quality to the herbage on which the sheep and goats feed, and that if the animals are transported to other parts of Persia their fleeces become coarser in fibre.

The designs on these carpets are very varied, and the unorthodox Persian, whose artistic instincts were too strong to suffer him to be bound by the Mohammedan law to copy nothing living, adorns his carpets with trees, flowers, animals, and birds, often with most charming effect. For example, a large Kerman rug may have the entire centre filled with a Persian white rose-tree, the single blooms showing clearly against a coffee-coloured ground. Parrots,

<sup>1</sup> "Antiquity of Oriental Carpets" (*Journal Society of Arts*, November 6, 1908).

hoopoes, and *bulbuls* perch among its branches, while at its foot stand two cypresses, the trees of immortality, near which are doves with bleeding hearts. There are probably five borders, some narrow and some broad, to this beautiful work, the broadest having a cream ground on which a blue ribbon loops itself in fantastic knots.

The Tekké Turkoman carpets are as finely woven as are the Kerman, and their pile when old looks just like velvet. In colouring, however, they are completely different, the groundwork of every carpet being a superb crimson which may in a few cases be a reddish brown. The characteristic pattern is said to be a copy of the *bazuband* or amulet case, which is fastened on the forearm of true believers to avert the "evil eye," and within this are conventionalised camels' heads stretching their long necks to nibble at trefoil, a reminiscence of the nomad life of the weavers. Another kind, woven by a different tribe, is distinguished by a broad cross, much ornamented with indigo and creamy white, and supposed by some to have been inspired by the Nestorian Church, once so widely spread throughout Asia.

A new Turkoman carpet is not a pleasing object to the European eye, its bright magentas and hard whites making a crude combination that gives little idea of the wonderful reds and creams that it will change into with the course of years, provided that no aniline dyes have been used. Nowadays old carpets are much sought after and are hard to get, as there is a great demand for them in the Constantinople bazaars, and Persians sometimes try to make a carpet *kheili khadim*, or antique, by skilful doctoring. It is no

uncommon thing for a new carpet to be laid down in the bazaar for men and animals to trample over it, its owner affirming that this apparently drastic process brings up the pile and enhances the colours. This once done the carpet will last for a century, chairs not being in use in Iran, and footgear being left at the door of the room. Besides the ordinary carpets, *gilims* or cotton carpets (*i.e.*, with no pile), are much used in travelling, as they fold up easily; and the floor of a room is often covered with the handsome *nammads* or felt carpets, very thick and heavy and with coloured designs on the grey or buff groundwork.

But everything must give way to the splendour of the silk carpets, those most exquisite creations of the loom, their colours gleaming like jewels in the sunlight, and having a wonderful depth and richness.

It may interest the reader to know how to choose a carpet. The dealer will spread out several before the would-be buyer, who will immediately turn up a corner of any one he may fancy in order to see whether the pattern is as clear on the wrong side as on the right, a sign of good weaving. He will next count how many stitches go to the square inch. Aniline dyes are forbidden to be imported into Persia, but certain colours may have a suspicious look, and the purchaser will now wet his handkerchief and rub it hard on the carpet, rejecting it if there is the faintest colour on the linen. The next thing is to ascertain whether the *kali* lies straight on the ground and is not *kaj*, or crooked; also whether it is stiff when folded over, as if otherwise it is loosely woven. The edges ought to be examined to see whether creases may not have been cut out of

them and the rents fine-drawn together ; and Persians value a small pattern more highly than a large one, because the former requires more skilful weaving.

As the inhabitants of Persia have been one of the most artistic nations in the world for over two thousand years, during which they influenced Greek, Roman, and Byzantine art, and were the originators of that termed Saracenic, it may be understood that it is impossible in the limits of a single chapter to give more than the merest glance at their art productions.



NOMADS WEAVING CARPETS





## CHAPTER XIX

### PERSIAN SUPERSTITIONS AND THE ART OF MEDICINE

THE ordinary Persian has such a profound belief in ghouls, *divs* (demons), *jinns*, and *afrits*, that the European who can persuade him to talk about his superstitions will have the sense of being in the Middle Ages. The ghoul is supposed to lurk in lonely places, its aim being to lure travellers from their path and devour them. It is a huge monster with blood-stained jaws, but has the power of assuming any form it pleases, often appearing as an animal, or even as a human being, in order to deceive its intended victim.

The gloomy "Valley of the Angel of Death," not far from Kum, is said to be haunted by these creatures, and this is the kind of tale that Persians tell about them :—

"Once upon a time" (so a public story-teller surrounded by his audience will begin), "there lived a very holy dervish, Niamatulla by name. So pious was he that he spent most of his days at the shrine of the thrice-blessed Fatima at Kum, and he was held in such high esteem that when the *mujtehid* (high priest) of the mosque died, he was chosen by general acclaim to

succeed him, and his prayers and fasts were the marvel of the whole city.

In fact so widely was the fame of his holiness spread, that the Shah on his throne summoned the saint to Tehran to ask his advice about some important matter of state.

Now it may not be generally known by the *Feringhis* that there is a certain district between Kum and the capital of Persia which is called the "Valley of the Angel of Death." Even in these days it is not safe for a man to traverse it alone; but at that time no one unaccompanied could brave its precipitous tracks, leading along terrific abysses, and hope to reach the end of his journey alive.

Azrael, King of the Dead, dwells there, surrounded by his court of ghouls, who, as all the world knows, feed on corpses, and rejoice in wars and pestilences, as such events bring them food in abundance. These horrible creatures are for ever possessed with an insatiable hunger, and as, moreover, they have the power of turning into any shape they please, in order to allure the unwary traveller to destruction, they are not pleasant to meet upon a lonely road.

Now when the royal command arrived from the Shah summoning the dervish Niamatulla to Tehran, there was much rejoicing among the Faithful at the honour paid to the *mujtehid* of Kum, and his disciples wished to accompany him in a body to the capital. What was their horror when the holy man announced that he intended to travel alone! "What are ghouls and demons," said he, "to one who has made the pilgrimages to Mecca, Kerbela, and Meshed, and has there earned the titles of *Haji*, *Kerbelai*, and *Meshedi*? Do I

not carry amulets sufficient to daunt an army of ghouls, and have I not enough *suras* of the Koran on the tip of my tongue to confuse the subtlest intellect among them?"

His disciples were forced to admit that he was in the right, and indeed all of you know that the Confession of Faith repeated aloud can rout the hungriest ghoul; but few among you would care to put your religion to such a severe test.

However, Niamatulla was firm, and left the holy city unaccompanied, turning his back on Fatima's golden-domed shrine, as many of his weeping disciples feared, for ever.

He had only just entered the "Valley of the Angel of Death," when he perceived a camel limping towards him, its halter trailing along the ground, and its sides heaving as if from exhaustion. Of course he knew at once that it must be a ghoul, and having looked to see whether the amulet case which contains the sacred sheep's eye from Mecca, together with that verse of the Koran which has power over all demons, was in its usual place on his forearm, he went forward confidently. As soon as he was close to the animal, it knelt upon the ground, as if begging the dervish to mount it; but Niamatulla guessed immediately that its purpose was to spring over the precipice with him if he were so unwary as to get upon its back. Therefore he stood still, and catching the halter he remarked, looking into its eyes, "*Mashallah!* Hast thou never heard how the jackal dipped itself in indigo, and thought it was the peacock?"

By this proverb the ghoul knew that it was discovered, and the camel vanished in a cloud of sulphur, leaving the rope in the hand of the dervish.

The holy man continued his way rejoicing, but he had not gone much further when he was met by a traveller having such a remarkable likeness to his own brother who dwelt at Tehran, that for a moment he believed that the apparition must be his relative in truth. However, as he exclaimed "*Alhamdolillah!*" in his joy, he noted that the figure shuddered in every limb and by this infallible sign he knew that he was again confronted by the ghoul.

"*Bismillah!*" he remarked, "dost thou not know that only a Mazanderani dog can catch a Mazanderani fox; which is to say, that only he who has steeped his soul in spiritual things can defeat the evil powers of the spirit world?" And for the second time the demon vanished, and Niamatulla went forward praising Allah.

But suddenly a most awful creature stood right in his path, vast and terrible, its jaws dripping with blood, and the holy man perceived that the fiend was about to try its power against him for yet a third time.

Of course Niamatulla had no fear of the demon, though it was jet-black and had eyes which shot fire. He was well aware that the mention of his name alone would be enough to rout the ghoul utterly; but the *mujtehid* had a kindly heart. He knew that not many of the Faithful were as well equipped as he to do battle with the servants of Azrael, and he bethought himself how he could destroy the fiend, and thus render the path through that accursed valley safer in the future. Of course all of you know that ghouls are not a clever race, and indeed there are many tales to show that a man, if he be quick-witted, may get the better of these horrible monsters.

By the side of the track on which the ghoul ap-

peared to Niamatulla stood a gigantic plane-tree, and the sight of its wide-spreading branches suggested to the holy man how he could carry out his purpose. Without evincing the least fear of the demon, he took the halter and twisted one end round a sturdy bough of the tree, leaving a hanging noose, the ghoul meanwhile watching him full of astonishment.

"Hast thou ever seen the foreigners play their games of skill in the capital?" Niamatulla then inquired of the demon, which became uneasy at the mention of foreigners; because all ghouls are powerless in the presence of unbelievers, and are unable to harm the least among the *Feringhis*.

The ghoul said that it had never been present when the foreigners amused themselves in the great square at Tehran, and the high priest then explained that one of their games consisted in running at full speed and endeavouring to thrust their heads into a noose which dangled from a post. It was not such an easy feat as it looked, he said, and he himself ran two or three times towards the noose hanging from the plane-tree, but did not appear to be able to thrust his head into the loop.

The ghoul looked on vastly amused, and when Niamatulla stopped, apparently exhausted, it said, "This seems, O stranger, quite an easy matter," and rushing towards the noose it put its head into it. At the same moment the holy man hauled with all his might at the end of the halter, calling out, "In the name of the Blessed Prophet, and in the name of the twelve Imams, perish, accursed one, that darest to molest the True Believers."

The ghoul was huge, and Niamatulla was a little man; but the *mujtehid* of Kum was great in faith,

and won the day in spite of the terrific yells and struggles of the fiend.

The fame of the saint now spread throughout the length and breadth of Persia, and crowds came to gaze at the corpse of the strangled demon hanging from the plane-tree. It is said that the King of Kings himself travelled from Tehran for that purpose, and showed Niamatulla great honour during his lifetime, and raised a shrine to his memory when the saint at last joined the Prophet in the regions of the Blessed. A chorus of "*Shahbash!*" and "*Ba! Ba!*" and a shower of copper coins will be the reward of a successful storyteller.

Ghouls are by no means confined to the "Valley of the Angel of Death." Their special habitat is the graveyard, and no Persian will cross a cemetery after sunset, even if he have to make a considerable *détour* to avoid it.

They tell a story of how a man boasted to his friend of his courage, and to prove this agreed to go to the public cemetery after dark and hammer a big nail into the ground in the very centre of the haunted spot. He went on the appointed night and squatted down on his heels to drive the nail well home; but having done so, he found himself unable to rise, and seized with fear he yelled for help in his terror. His friend, who had secretly followed him and had seen how in his haste he had hammered the nail into the long skirt of his coat, now appeared and released him with many a taunt at his cowardice!

Persians say that a true believer who utters the name of the Prophet in all sincerity can never be harmed by a ghou, yet no one cares to run the risk of wandering among ruins, even in broad daylight, unless in company with a European; the idea being that evil spirits decline

to appear when *Feringhis* are present, because the latter do not believe in such visitants.

*Divs* or demons, are supposed to be cat-headed men with horns and hoofs and are peculiarly active at night, no Persian caring to sleep alone lest these malignant spirits should harm him during the hours of darkness. On account of this rich men often hire a priest to share their bedroom. For the same reason no one will go into a dark room without exclaiming *Bismillah!* (In the name of God) to scare away its possible ghostly occupant, and it would be sheer madness to whistle at night, as such an act would be an invitation to the demons to strangle the heedless man. It is also impossible to eat any food cooked on the previous day, as a devil may have overlooked it during the darkness and thus rendered it poisonous.

*Jinns* and *afrits* are less dreaded than ghouls and demons, but no one will kill dogs or cats in case these animals are the dwelling-places of spirits that will wreak vengeance on those who have deprived them of their lodging. The public baths are said to be haunted by *jinns*, and on account of this no man likes to be alone in any of the numerous apartments, and no one dares to throw hot water at any distance from a house, but will pour it slowly and carefully near at hand or in the garden, murmuring *Bismillah!* as he does so. If the water be flung away carelessly it may fall on a *jinn*, which will, not unnaturally, be enraged and seek to exact retribution; and for the same cause it is most dangerous to fling stones. If a Persian happens to be seized with an epileptic fit his illness is laid at the door of these spirits, who, so the onlookers affirm, are beating the sufferer, probably on

account of some bit of carelessness such as we have mentioned.

All over Persia on the desert plains the wind blows the dust up into columns, which spin round and round with great swiftness, and these the Persians call *jinn*s or *shaitans* (devils), believing that if a *mulla* writes his good deeds on a piece of paper and can throw it into one of these whirls it will be transmuted into gold.

Persians pay much attention to dreams, the taking of *fals* or lots, charms, witchcraft, and so on, and therefore give considerable employment to astrologers. They themselves consult the Fates by opening the Koran or the poems of Hafiz at random or by means of the beads of their rosaries, but will do nothing of importance without calling in an astrologer. No journey can be undertaken, no bargain closed, no house inhabited for the first time, no city entered, or even medicine taken, unless the omens are propitious. These astrologers and some of the dervishes tell fortunes by spinning dice on brass rods, and then consulting a book of divination to see what the numbers portend, and they are also called in to recover stolen property.

This was the mode of procedure in a case that came under the writer's notice. A gold bangle having unaccountably vanished, a servant boy who had been convicted of dishonesty on a previous occasion was, not unnaturally, suspected of the theft. To make sure, a dervish was called in, and the servants being summoned, the holy man gazed fixedly at their faces as they stood before him. He then wrote all their names on slips of paper, rolling each slip into a little ball of dough, which he threw into a basin of water, and he then exclaimed,



"The thief is in this room and the bracelet has not left the house!"

After reciting a certain passage of the Koran he picked a dough ball out of the bowl without looking, and it was found, when opened, to contain the name of the boy. This ceremony having been performed three times, and always with the same result, the culprit, volubly protesting his innocence, was hurried off to the prison, where he was immured in a dark and noisome dungeon. He was put on scanty rations of bread and water and suffered the bastinado, but nothing would persuade him to confess, until a youth, his bosom-friend, was sent to urge him to reveal the whereabouts of the bracelet, promising him a free pardon if he would do so.

"Remove the big water-jar that stands in the corner of the courtyard of my master's house," said the thief, "and under it you will find a new brick which is quite loose, and if you pull this up you will see the bangle."

The youth hurried to the house, where the directions of the thief were followed, and when the bracelet was recovered the fame of the dervish resounded throughout the city.

Persians believe firmly in lucky and unlucky days. For example, the thirteenth of the month of Saffar is a day of evil omen, and all men and women leave their houses and spend the hours between sunrise and sunset in the open air in order to avert the harm that would probably overtake them were they to stay indoors. Therefore the scene outside the walls of a Persian town is one of unusual animation—horsemen galloping wildly about the plain, men shooting at a mark often placed in perilous proximity to the public highway, and

the women repairing to gardens to indulge in swinging, it being *wajib* or lucky, to do so on this day.

The peasants engage in the unusual dissipation of games, of which tip-cat and a kind of rounders appear to be the favourites, middle-aged men playing these with enthusiasm, and every one is careful not to give way to anger, as a quarrel is sure to lead to disaster.

The Day of Judgment is supposed to take place on the last Wednesday in Saffar, consequently all Wednesdays are unlucky days, and the whole month is of evil omen, probably from the fact that Mohammed died during its course. Thirteen is an unlucky number in Persia, and no educated Persian can give any reason for this; but the writer has been informed that the thirteenth of every month was a day of ill-omen with the ancient Parsis, from whom probably the Persians derive the superstition.

To an ordinary Persian the good or bad fortune of a day depends upon the first face that he has seen after waking, and the well-to-do are always particular to have a servant with a "lucky" face near them when they open their eyes in the morning. Such people as public executioners and their children are said to have "black hearts" and consequently "unlucky" visages; and in the writer's own experience everything that went wrong in the house was put down to an unfortunate servant, son of one of these ill-omened officials.

When seeing the new moon for the first time Persians are careful to look at a "fortunate" face or at a "lucky" object, such as gold or silver, which they hold in readiness in their hands, but woe to the man whose glance falls accidentally on a veiled woman or on a dog!

On going on a journey it is well to leave the house

with the face turned towards the door in order to ensure a safe return ; it is unlucky to send a letter unless a corner be cut off, and the edges must be clipped, as otherwise a man's wives may be untrue to him ; disaster may occur if a man commence walking with the left foot or if a gazelle pass on the left of a rider, and it is unwise to finish any building or large piece of embroidery completely lest death overtake the worker. On the other hand, it is lucky to be the first to enter a new building, and the Shah has been known to give an audience on some important matter in a freshly erected pavilion in order that the business on hand might progress satisfactorily.

It is also a usual custom to slay a goat in order to ensure prosperity to any personage who enters a town. On the approach of the traveller the animal is killed in the middle of the road and its head is then placed on one side and its body on the other, the man thus honoured riding between the severed parts of the goat and across its blood ; sweetmeats are often thrown under the hoofs of the traveller's horse for the same purpose.

All Persian women starting on a journey give money to the beggars to avert accident, and on one occasion when the writer's horse shied and was within an ace of precipitating her into the city-moat, she was assured by a Persian gentleman that the incident was entirely owing to her lack of charity as she left her home !

Travellers are sped on their way by being shown a mirror, or offered a glass of water on which floats the head of a flower, or perhaps the smoke of burning herbs is waved before them. To sneeze *once* when starting on any expedition is an evil omen, and Persians

will look fixedly at the sun in order to induce a second or third sneeze. If they are unsuccessful they will put off their journey, as they have little faith in an invocation to Allah, which is supposed to be efficacious in averting disaster. Curiously enough, they also believe that if they are desiring anything ardently, and some one should happen to sneeze at the moment, their wish is certain to be granted. It is wise to suppress yawning as much as possible, for the Prophet said that when any one opened his mouth in a yawn the devil smiled!

It is unlucky to name a horse after a Persian, because any evil that may befall the animal will also overtake the man after whom it is called. If, however, an accident happens to a horse and the rider escapes unscathed, the spectators say, "The horse has become a sacrifice," meaning that the injury meant for the rider has fallen on his steed.

Throughout Persia there is a very strong belief in the "evil eye," and every European on entering the country is warned not to admire children or animals without uttering the word *Mashallah* to avert this malign influence. If he omit the precaution and harm follows, the entire blame of the sickness or accident to human being or horse will be laid at the door of the forgetful foreigner, and many Persians will refuse to mention the exact number of their children or possessions on this account.

Blue is the colour to ward off the "evil eye," and every one who can afford it wears a turquoise ring; the children are adorned with turquoises or blue beads, the latter being attached to the tails or harness of all horses, mules, camels, and donkeys in order to safe-



PERSIAN BARBER EXTRACTING TEETH



guard them. Turquoises are also supposed to save their wearers from being cheated in business; but as every merchant carries one in a ring the effect must be considerably neutralised.

Medicine in Persia must be classed under the head of superstitions, as it is absolutely unscientific and dependent upon astrology and charms. All diseases are divided into hot and cold, and are treated by contraries. For example, a man attacked with a burning fever will probably be carried out of the house in the depth of winter and laid in the stream of ice-cold water running through the garden, because the Prophet said that fever was hell-fire and must be extinguished by means of water. Cholera is treated in the same way, but the Persian doctor, however, invariably refuses to give water to his patients to drink, let their craving for it be ever so intense. He often administers the powder of rubies or emeralds as a tonic, and a ground-up pearl is occasionally resorted to when the patient is believed to be at the point of death. If any one is badly burnt the wounds will be smeared with soot from the bottom of the cooking vessels, and pomegranate juice will be taken internally. A remedy for pneumonia is to wrap the sick person up in a raw hide, sore eyes being cured by an application of powdered glass!

If witchcraft is suspected, one method is to bake eggs on the hearthstone of the patient's room, calling each by the name of some possible enemy. The egg that cracks first reveals the name of the wizard, and in order to free the sick man from his power the egg must be thrown into running water. Another plan is for the wife of the patient to beg bits of bread from the

whole circle of his acquaintance, as if he can eat the food of the man who has bewitched him he will be cured.

The following case of a kind of faith-cure came under the notice of an English doctor.

A Persian lady of rank was afflicted with violent convulsions, which, as they did not yield to medical treatment, were put down to the work of a demon. Accordingly, a *sartip*, or colonel, who had a great reputation as an exorcist, was summoned to her aid. The procedure adopted was to light dozens of little lamps and place them all round the divan on which the patient lay, and the *sartip* then asked her again and again what she saw, but the answer was always the same, "Nothing but lamps."

At last in despair he summoned an old woman whom he had cured of a like complaint, and she, on being adjured, immediately declared that she saw a devil. "Tell him to depart," said the colonel. "He says that in flying past this house he saw this lady and loved her so much for her beauty that he will never leave her," was the answer of the hag. The *sartip*, summoning all his power, conjured the fiend to release his victim; but the demon replied, according to the old woman, that he found his prey too much to his taste to desert her, and that the lady had "made roast meat of his heart." The *sartip* at this had reached the limit of his patience, and exclaimed in anger, "Then tell the demon that if he doesn't go at once, I will turn him into a Mohammedan." This dire threat caused the evil spirit to fly away in haste; but in spite of the colonel's victory his patient steadily became worse instead of better, and when my informant was summoned as a last resource,



he found the lady so exhausted that heroic remedies were needed to save her life.

Persians say that it is a good thing to get influenza, but that if the complaint attacks the head it turns the hair white, and they also affirm that those who have never been victims to *mesh mesh* as they call it, get grey very early in life.

Faith-cures are not uncommon. Dervishes pretend to write powerful charms on scraps of paper, which when swallowed in a believing spirit effect a cure, and the chief stock-in-trade of a Persian doctor is a brass bowl the outside of which is elaborately incised with the signs of the Zodiac and texts from the Koran. The inner surface is engraved with short prayers to suit all diseases, and the doctor has merely to make a feint of unlocking with a key the prayer that alludes to his patient's complaint, and when the sick man has drunk the water with which the basin is filled he will speedily recover. An instance of this sort of cure is reported by an English lady-doctor, who was asked for a token by which her patient would be admitted to her presence. For lack of anything better she gave a safety-pin, and was somewhat surprised that the sufferer did not make her appearance at the appointed time. Some days afterwards she appeared, beaming with joy, and exclaiming as she held out the safety-pin, "*Salaams!* may the shadow of the gracious *Khanum* never grow less! I placed the powerful *Feringhi* charm in a bowl full of water, and after drinking the liquid for seven days I was completely cured. *Alhamdulillah!*" And, full of gratitude, she restored the pin to her bewildered preserver!

As might be expected from what has gone before,

lunatics meet with no mercy in Persia. These unfortunates are put in the stocks, and their hands fastened with chains to the wall above their heads ; they are alternately beaten and starved, with the laudable intention of driving the devil out of them ; they are dowsed with a decoction of herbs poured over them when violently roused from their slumbers by the yells of their misguided friends ; and they are confined in horrible dungeons.

But enough has been said to give the reader some idea of the extraordinary network of superstition that encloses a Persian from the cradle to the grave, and from which only progress and the spread of education can free him.

That these benefits may come to Persia, and that she may have her full share in what seems to be an awakening of the East, is the earnest hope of one who sympathises deeply with her and her people.

May the perusal of this book add some of its readers to the ranks of those who wish well to Iran !

She has existed as a kingdom for some twenty-five centuries, and in the past her record has been glorious. So many of her sons have been famous that to-day it ought not to be impossible to find amongst their descendants one who will exhibit the statesmanship and patriotism of an Ardeshir, an Ismail, or a Shah Abbas, and lead his country to prosperity.

*Khoshbakht bāa Iran !*  
(Good luck to Iran !)

# INDEX

- ABADEH, 71
- Abbas, Shah, 7, 31, 40, 59, 96,  
109, 112, 113, 128, 154, 173, 228,  
260, 271, 317, 318 ; sword of, 169
- Abbas*, 100
- Abdul Azim, Shah, shrine of, 165
- Abdullah, 152, 154
- Abraham, 73, 136
- Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna), 29,  
300, 302
- Achæmenian kings, the, 7, 13, 16,  
19, 39, 40, 50, 273
- Acre, 142, 262
- Afghan invasion of Persia, 31, 32,  
40, 53, 99-100 ; the Amir, 111
- Afrasiyab, king of Tartary, 290, 294
- Agha Mohammed Khan, 32, 33,  
40, 48, 184
- Ahasuerus, 39
- Ahwaz, 153, 234-6
- Akbar, servant, 166, 168, 178, 179,  
185, 187
- Al Mukanna, story of, 139-40
- Al Tabari, historian, 242
- Alamut, 43, 44, 45
- Albigenses, the, 22
- Albuquerque, 228
- Alhambra, the, 317
- Aleppo, 305
- Alexander the Great, 16, 21, 40,  
124 192, 227, 274 ; death of, 17 ;  
camp of, destroyed, 193 ; sarcoph-  
agus of, 238 ; legends of, 266-7 ;  
his place in Persian history, 299
- Ali, 30-31, 73, 80, 95, 108, 113,  
129, 134 ; tomb of, 96 ; death of,  
146 ; and Fatima, 145-6
- Ali Akbar, 154
- Almsgiving, Mohammedan, 131,  
134, 136
- Alp Arslan, 29, 300
- American missionaries, 138
- Amrou, 146
- Andaman Islands, the, 269
- Anderoon*, the, 35, 54-6, 197,  
202
- Animals, Persian, treatment of,  
84-5 ; fodder, 215 ; wild ani-  
mals, 238-44 ; domestic animals,  
244-8
- Antichrist, Moslem belief regarding,  
134
- Antony, Mark, 19
- Anwari, fame of, 304
- Arab tribes of the Persian Gulf, 5,  
11 ; characteristics, 234 ; encamp-  
ments, 234 ; the Arab horse, 235-6
- Arabian Sea, 225 ; vegetation, 5
- Arabic language, the, 61, 64, 73, 74
- Arabistan, 5, 233, 237
- Araxes, the, 128
- Arbela, 16
- Abre Sol, the, of Khorasan, 266
- Architecture, Persian, 315-16
- Ardebil, 31
- Ardeshtir, King, 21, 109, 124, 264,  
299
- Area of Persia, 1

- Armenia, conquest of, 18, 19, 21  
 Armenians, 128-9, 138  
 Army, the Persian soldier, 60-1  
 Arnold, Matthew, "Sohrab and Rustum," 249, 297  
 Arsaces I., 18  
 Art, Persian, 316-19, 272-3; Saracenic, 28, 324  
 Artabanus, 20, 21  
 Artaxerxes, Longimanus, 39; palace of, 316  
 Artaxerxes III., 15-16  
 Artemisium, 15  
 Aryans, the, 11  
 Asia Minor, conquest by Cyrus, 13-14  
 Askhabad, 88, 89, 90, 111  
 Assassins, the 44-5  
 Asses, Persian, 247  
 Assyria, 14  
 Astrabad, 32, 42  
 Astrology, 332  
 Astyages, 13  
 Athens, burning of, 15  
 Attar of Roses, 184  
 Aurora, the, 177  
 Aurungzebe, 53  
 Austria, relations with Persia, 35, 61  
 Austrian Tyrol, the, 107  
 Avesta, the, 21, 124, 125, 284  
 Avicenna. *See* Abu Ali ibn Sina  
 Ayesha, 145, 146, 201  
 Azerbaijan, 5, 14, 40, 123  
  
 BABIS SECT, THE, 36, 140-3  
 Babylon, 14, 17, 40, 273  
 Bactria, 13, 17; Tartar invasion, 124  
 Badakshan, 269  
 Badgirs, 180, 237  
*Bad-i-Sud-i-bist-rux*, the, 6  
 Baghdad, the Khalifate at, 28, 29, 30, 40, 227, 262, 305; sack of, 310  
  
 Bahram V. (Bahram Gor), 23, 238; legends of, 243  
 Bahram Chubin, 25  
 Bahramabad, 182-3  
 Bahrein, 229-32; necropolis at, 227  
 Bakhtiari, the, 5, 32, 34, 37, 38, 87  
 Baku, 41, 88, 89  
 Balkh, 124, 262, 263, 267  
 Balsora. *See* Busreh  
 Baluchistan, 5, 7, 8; inhabitants of, 5, 188-9; heat of, 185; annexation of, 187; cairns, 189-90; the horse in, 191; the peasant of, 210; British, 10; Persian, 188  
 Bam, 33, 187  
 Bampur, 192  
 Bampur river, the, 190  
 Bandar Abbas, 228, 230, 266  
 Bandar Nasser, 234  
*Bandeh*, the, 66  
 Bastinado, the, 84, 196  
 Bathing, 72-3  
 Batoum, 41, 88  
 Battle of the Camel, 146  
*Bayan*, the, 142  
 Bazaars, 73, 88, 100, 161  
*Bazuband*, the, 322  
 Beha, 142-3  
 Belgians in Meshed, 91  
 Belisarius, General, 23  
 Benjamin, Mr. S. G. W., "Persia and the Persians" *cited*, 152-3, 319  
 Bent, Mr. Theodore, 232  
 Bird life Persia, 248-53  
 Birdwood, George, "The Antiquity of Oriental Carpets," 222-3, 321  
*Birouni*, 197, 204  
 Bisitun, bas-reliefs, 274-5, 315  
 Bisitun, rock of, 25  
 Blandford, Dr., 3  
 Blizzards, 174  
 Blocqueville, M. de, 110  
 Boars, wild, 240-1

- Bokhara, 29, 109, 261, 310; Mongol invasion, 30  
 Bokhariotes, 100  
 Bombay, 10; the Victoria Gardens, 222-3  
*Boussa*, the, 9  
 Bread, 212-13  
 Bridge of Sirat, 77  
 Browne, Prof. E. G., "Literary History of Persia," *cited*, 43 *note*, 284, 286, 306; "A Year Amongst the Persians," *cited*, 140, 141, 214, 311  
 Buddhist beliefs, 122, 123, 132  
*Buggelows*, 228  
*Bulbuls*, 220, 252  
 Burial customs, Persian, 76-8, 120-1; Zoroastrian custom of exposure, 125-6, 180-1, 273; burial of women, 207-8;  
 Burma, 269  
 Bushire, 2, 10, 35, 230, 232-3, 254  
 Busreh, 227-8, 262
- CÆSAR, JULIUS, 18  
 Cairns in Baluchistan, 189-90  
 Calendar, reform of the, 301  
 Camadi (Shahr-i-Jiruft), 265, 269  
 Cambyes, 14, 273  
 Camels, 185, 245-6; the "Camelry," 191  
 "Caravan of the Dead," 120-1, 207  
 Caravaning, 162  
 Carpets, Persian, 104; Kerman, 184, 321; centres, 320; the hand loom, 320; designs, 321; Tekké Turkoman, 321-2; faking the antique, 322-3; silk carpets, 323; how to choose a carpet, 323-4  
 Carrhæ, battle of, 18-19  
 Carriages, 162  
 Caspian, the, climate, 2-5; fisheries, 10; Russian influence, 34  
 Cassius, 20
- Cats, Persian, 248  
 Caucasus, the, 34  
 Cemeteries, superstitions regarding, 330-1  
 Centipedes, 255-6  
 Ceylon, 269  
*Chadars*, 199, 200, 202, 206  
 Chang Ki'en, 268  
*Chapar-khanas*, 162, 173, 181  
 Chardin, "Voyages en Perse," *cited*, 31, 40, 109, 260  
*Chargat*, the, 198  
*Charvadars*, 120-1, 164, 183, 185  
 Chedorlaomer, King, 237  
*Chilau kabob*, the, 71  
*Chilaus*, 70  
 Children carpet-makers, 320  
 China, 269; Christianity in, 128; early trade of, 262; Chinese art in Persia, 318  
 Chinghiz Khan, 28-30, 116, 261, 304  
 Chinvad, bridge of, 126  
 Christianity in Persia, 25, 127, 128  
 City of Martyrdom, 49  
 Civil War of B.C. 323, 17  
 Climate of Persia, 2-5  
 Coal, scarcity of, 9  
 Cochin China, 269  
 Cockroaches, 225  
 Coin, Persian, 163-4  
 Colleges, military, 35  
 Cologne Cathedral, tomb of the "Three Kings," 263  
 Confucius, 122  
 Conolly, 261  
 Constantinople, Persian invasion, 26; bazaars, 100; museum of, 238  
 Constitution, the Persian, 36-8, 50  
 Corruption, system of, 58-9  
 Court, the Persian, description, 50; etiquette of, 51; ministers, 58; the system of corruption, 58-9; personal nature of the Government, 59

- Cracow, 89  
 Crassus, 18-19  
 Crime and punishment, 84  
 Crimea, the, 38  
 Croesus, King of Lydia, 14  
 Cromer, Lord, 10-11  
 Crops, Persian, 212-15  
 Crows, 252-3  
 Crusaders, the, 43, 132, 305  
 Ctesiphon, Arch of, 40, 315  
 Ctesiphon on the Tigris, 19, 24, 40  
 Cuneiform inscriptions, 271; the key to, 275  
 Curzon, Lord, "Persia," *cited*, 5, 53, 61, 141, 238, 270, 272, 274, 275.  
 Customs, Persian — Buying and selling, 47-8; dress, 56, 65-6, 198-200, 200-1; servants, 67-8, 82-3; slaves, 68-9; prayer, 69-70, 73; a well-to-do Persian's day, 69-72; eating, 70-2; dyeing the hair, 72-3; the baths, 72-3; marriage, 74-6, 201-6; the Persian oath, 81-2; criminal punishment, 84; treatment of animals, 84-5; the poor of Persia, 103; dress, 198-200, 218; divorce, 204-5; uncleanness, 217-18; death and burial. *See* Burial customs  
 Cyriades, enthronement of, 275, 276  
 Cyrus the Great, 2, 13-14, 16, 17, 39, 237, 273, 274  
  
*DAKMEHS*, 180, 185  
 Damietta Stone, the, 275  
 Daniel, Book of, 236  
 Daniel, tomb of, 237  
 Daqiqi, poet, 285  
 Darius I., 14-15, 39, 299; Persepolis, 271-3; the cuneiform writings, 275; palace of, at Susa, 316  
 Darius II., 299  
 Darius III., 16  
 Darwin, *cited*, 254  
 Darya-i-Nur, the, 52  
 Date-palms, 190, 213  
 Day of Judgment, the Mohammedan, 134-5  
 Days of omen, 333-4  
 Decoration, Persian, 315-17  
 Deforestation, 9, 184, 236, 262  
 Deioces, palace of, 39  
 Delhi, 32; siege of, 52, 53  
*Dellals*, 47  
 Demavend, volcano, 2, 45, 171, 253, 289  
 Demons, 291-3, 331  
 Dervishes, 101-2, 150-1,  
 Deserts, salt, 6-7  
 Dieulafoy, M., *cited*, 237, 316  
 Dieulafoy, Mme, 237  
 Dishes, Persian, 70-2, 213  
 Distance, measurement of, 167  
*Div-i-Safid*, the White Demon, 292  
 "Divine Right," 272  
 Divorce, Persian, 126, 204-5  
 Diz, the, 238  
 Dizful, 236  
 Dogs, pariah, 101, 247-8; Zoroastrian reverence for, 125  
*Doghela bazi*, 280  
 Doshan Tepé, palace of, 56  
 Dove, the, 252  
 Dreams, superstitions concerning, 332  
 Dress, the Persian woman's, 56, 198-200; the boy's, 65; the Persian man's, 65-6; origin of the veil, 200-1  
 Dryden, *quoted*, 272  
 Durand, Sir Edward, 232  
 Durand, Sir Mortimer, "Nadir Shah," 216  
 Dust-storms, 181-2  
 Dyes, Persian, 321  
  
 EAST INDIA COMPANY, 228  
 Eastwick, Mr., *cited*, 94, 110, 131

- "Eating Sticks," 84, 196  
 Ecbatana, 39  
 Education, in Persia, 61; the Persian youth, 64; the Persian girl, 197; village schools, 218-19  
 Eed-i-Kurban, feast of, 136  
 Egypt, 14, 15  
 Elam (Arabistan), 5, 233, 237  
 Elburz mountains, the, 2-3, 42-5, 171, 287, 289  
 Elizabeth, Queen, 31  
 El-Kadinyah, battle of, 27  
 English influence in Persia—Telegraph service, 9-10; relations with Nasr-ed-Din Shah, 35; the agreement of 1907, 38; English appearance of Resht, 41-2; the Legation, Tehran, 49, 57; Attitude towards the slave trade, 69; the Consulate, Meshed, 91; missionaries, 138; the English personality, 194-5; the Residency, Maskat, 226; policing the Gulf, 229-30  
 Enzeli, port of, 9, 41, 248  
 Ephesus, Council of, 127  
 Erivan, 41  
 Erythras, King, 227  
 Erzeroum, 41  
 Esther and Mordecai, tombs of, 39  
 Esther, Book of, 316  
 Euphrates, the, 18, 149, 233  
 Europe, Persian designs on, 16  
 "Evil Eye," the, 63, 336  
  
 FABLES, PERSIAN, 308  
 Fahraj, 192, 193  
 "False dawn," the, 186-7  
 Fao, 233  
 Fars (Pars), province of, 1, 309  
*Farsakh*, term, 167  
 Fasting, Moslem, 133-4, 211  
 Fath Ali Shah, 33-4, 48, 49, 51, 53, 96, 172, 258  
  
*Fatiha*, the, 70  
 Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, 169  
 Fatima, shrine at Kum, 154, 169, 205, 325, 327  
 Ferhad, story of, 251  
 Feridun, 27, 288-9, 299  
*Feringhis*, 80, 81; Persian superstition regarding, 329, 331  
 Ferrier, *cited*, 110  
 Festivals, Moslem, 136-7  
 Fin, garden of, 172  
 Firdawsî, poet, the "Book of Kings," 29, 109; daughter of, 98; fame of, 116, 304; tomb at Tus, 117-18; the *Shahnama*, 284, 285-6; events related in the poem, 287-99  
 Fire-worship. *See* Zoroastrianism  
*Firuzâ*, the, 118-19  
*Fisenjan*, the, 71  
 Fitch, Ralph, 228  
 Flora of Persia, 257-9; Persian love of flowers, 222-3  
 Floyer, M., "Unexplored Baluchistan," 190  
*Fourgeons*, 89  
 Foxes, 241-2  
 Fraser, "A Journey into Khorasan," *cited*, 93, 110, 117, 132, 169, 230  
 French excavations at Susa, 237  
 Friday, observation of, 73-4  
 Fruit, Persian, 258-9  
  
*GABRS*, 122, 125, 127, 179  
 Gadir, festival of, 111  
 Gadir Khom, village of, 145  
 Games, Persian, 280-3  
 Ganges, the, 16  
 Gardens, Persian, 219-23; English, at Tehran, 259  
 Gathas, the, 21, 124  
 Gazelle-shooting, 243, 277  
 Geneses, Book of, 237  
 Geok Tepé, 88, 110

- Georgia, 32  
 Ghazna, 300  
 Ghaznawi period of Persian literature, 300  
*Gholams*, 57  
 Ghouls, 171  
 Gilan, 42  
*Gilim*, 166  
 Goa, 228  
 Gobi, the, 266  
 Gobineau, Count, *cited*, 153-4  
 Gohar Shad, 93  
 Golden age of Persia, 7, 31, 96  
 Golf at Meshed, 108  
 Gombrun (Bandar Abbas), 228  
 Gothic architecture, characteristics, 112  
 Government, personal nature of the, 59  
 Great cold, the, 163  
 Greeks, 128; victory at Marathon, 15; massacre by the Macedonians, 17  
 Gulahek, 57  
 Gushtasp, King, 123  
 Gwadur, 185, 193, 194, 226
- HAFIZ (SHEMSEDDIN MOHAMMED)  
 —account of, 309-10; lines, *quoted*, 310-13; grave of, 311-12, 312-14; character of, 312-13; fame of, 332; *mentioned*, 79, 140, 157, 216, 223, 306  
 Hailstorms, 3, 214-15  
 Haj, feast of, 136  
 Haji Ibrahim, 32, 33  
*Haji*, title, 136, 137, 206, 326  
 Hamadan, 39; white wines of, 216  
*Hamun*, the, 6, 249  
 Hannibal, 19  
 Hasan, 146-7  
 "Hasan! Husein!" cry of, 144  
 Hasan-i-Sabbah, 43-4  
*Hasan kuli khan*, 263  
*"Hashish"*, 44, 67  
 Harun al Raschid, 28, 95  
 Hawking, 277-9  
 Helmand river, the, 6  
 Henna, use of, 57, 73  
 Heraclius, Emperor, 26  
 Herat, 29, 35, 111, 267  
 Herodotus, 64, 268  
 "Highway of the Nations," 262  
 Hindoos, 231  
 Holdich, Sir Thomas, "The Indian Borderland," *quoted*, 191  
 Holy Family, the, Mohammedan representations, 319  
 Hoopoe, the crested, 251  
 Hormuz, island of, 228, 230, 263; ancient trade of, 262, 265  
 Hormuzd, King, story of, 308  
 Horse, the, in Baluchistan, 191  
 Horses, arab, 235-6, 244; Persian, 244-5  
 Horse-riding, Persian method, 280  
 Houris, 78  
 House, the Persian, 197-8  
 Hulagu Khan, 30, 45, 262, 304, 310  
 Husein, 80, 96, 129; death of, 144, 147-8, 149, 151, 168; commemorations, *resumé* of a *tazieh*, 154-6.  
*See also* Muharram  
 Hyrcania, 239  
 Hystaspes, 271-3
- IBEX, THE, 243  
 Idol-worship, 20, 21, 124, 129  
 Ilyat tribe, the, 11, 34  
 Infant mortality, 218  
 Imam Juma, the, of Meshed, 131-2  
 Imam Reza, the—Legend of, 49, 95, 169; mosque and shrine of—description, 90-5, 116-17; history, 96-7, 113; the graveyard, 97-8; the Caravan of the Dead, 120-1; women pilgrims, 206-8



- Imams, the, 145  
 Imperial Bank of Persia, 35, 48  
 Imports and exports, 10  
 India—Telegraph communication with Persia, 10, 35; conquest of Alexander, 16; Persian conquest, 16, 32; postal service with Meshed, 111; the Parsis, 122; Christianity in, 128; early trade of, 262; Marco Polo in, 269  
 Indian archipelago, the, 269  
 Indians, Mohammedan, characteristics, 83-4  
 Indo-European Telegraph Company, 35, 226  
 Indus, the, 15, 17, 18, 227  
 Insect life, 255-7  
 Iran, ancient name of Persia, 1; history of, 13-38  
 Irani, the, appearance, 11-12  
 Irrigation in Persia, 212, 214  
 Isaiah, 14  
 Isfahan, 3, 31, 37, 40, 45, 128, 138, 141, 180, 300; the people of, 86, 176; Mosque of, 88; bygone splendour of, 161; caravaning to, 173-5; work of Shah Abbas in, 175  
 Isfundiar, 124  
 Ishmael, 136  
 Islamism in Persia—Question of the Prophet's successor, 30, 80; observance of Friday, 73-4; the name of God, 79-80; Moslem intolerance, 80, 81; teachings of, 129-37, 308; effect on the individual, 137; perverts from, 138; other teachers, 139-43; the woman's position, 208-9  
 Ismail Shah, 31, 140  
 Ismaili sect, the, 43-5  
 Issus, battle at, 16  
 Istakr, 273  
 Italian influence in Persian Art, 319  
 JACKALS, 242-3  
 Jackson, Prof. Williams, "Zoroaster," 122-3  
 Jagherk, 107-8  
 Jalk, 192  
 James I., 31  
 Jamshid, King, 274, 287, 288, 299  
 Japan, 269  
 Jask, 226, 228  
 Java, 269  
 Jay, the blue, 250-1  
 Jerusalem, siege of, 25  
 Jewels, royal, 52-3  
 Jews—Colony in Hamadan, 39; the Jews of Tehran, 54; transported into Isfahan, 128-9; Day of Atonement, 136  
*Jika*, the, 52  
*Jinns*, 171, 177, 181, 190, 248, 270, 331-2  
*Jira*, 163  
 Julfa, 128, 138  
 Julian, Emperor, 22  
 Jupa range, the, 186  
 Justice, administration of, 61-2  
 Kaaba, the, Mecca, 70, 73, 136-7  
*Kabobs*, 70, 71  
 Kabul, King of, 298  
 Kabutarkhan, 183  
*Kafilas*, 178, 181, 183  
*Kafirs*, 80, 81, 129  
*Kah*, 215  
 Kahrisek, 165  
 Kai Kaus, King, 291-2, 294, 299  
 Kaiani dynasty, the, 298  
 Kaianian Maliks, the, 192  
 Kaiumers, King, 287  
 Kajar tribe, the, 32, 33  
*Kajaveh*, 206  
 Kakha, 90  
 Kalats, 319-20  
*Kalians*, 67, 76, 79, 151  
*Kalma*, the, 93

- Kanats*, 103, 104, 106, 221, 279  
 Karachi, 10, 194, 225  
 Karnak, Hall of, Egypt, 272  
 Karun, the, 9, 22, 35, 153, 224, 233  
 Kashaf Rud, the, 106-7, 116  
 Kashan, 6, 10, 86, 171, 173, 263, 269; the minar, 88; scorpions of, 171-2; the Garden of Fin, 172; tiles of, 317; velvets of, 319  
 Kashgar, 305  
*Kashi*, 171  
 Kasim, 154  
 Kasr-i-Kajar, 57  
 Kasvin, 43, 44, 45  
 Kavah, leather apron of, 27, 289  
*Kavir*, the, 7, 168  
 Kazerun, 275  
*Kedkhoda*, the, 62  
 Kerbela, 96, 147, 149, 152, 156; pilgrims to, 206, 225  
*Kerbela*, title, 206, 326  
 Kerim Khan, 32  
 Kerman, 7, 21, 33, 138, 181, 182, 263; cost of living at, 8; shawls, 54, 65, 319-20; *Gabrs*, 122; the approach to, 183-4; the modern town, 184; Zoroastrians of, 185; the Desert, 186; trade of, 262; Marco Polo's visit, 264-5; Venetian routes, 269; carpets, 320-2  
 Kermanshah, 274; carpets, 320  
 Khaka, 116  
 Khalifate, the, 30, 40, 145, 148  
 Khanum Mariam, the, 138  
 Khanikoff, M., *cited*, 266  
*Khans*, 91  
 Khiva, 109  
 Khorasan, province of, 6, 11, 17, 32, 88, 110, 293, 300  
 Khosru I., 23-4, 40, 242  
 Khosru Parvis, 24-7, 109, 276  
*Khutbah*, the, 73  
 Khuzistan, lions of, 238  
 Killing animals, formula used, 279  
 "King of Kings," the title, 19, 40, 50  
 Kipling, Rudyard, "The Feet of the Young Men," *quoted*, 195  
 Kishm, 230  
 Kismet, 131, 218  
 Kizil Kum, the, 266  
 Kobad, 23  
 Kohrud river, 173  
 Kohrud, village of, 173  
 Kokachin, Princess, 267-8  
*Kolah Feringhi*, 221  
 Koran, the, 61, 64, 73, 135  
*Kotals*, 2, 232, 233, 270  
 Koweit, 229  
 Krasnovodsk, 88, 89  
 Kublai Khan, 261, 262; court of, 267  
 Kuchan, 89  
 Kufa, Mosque of, 146; death of Husein, 147  
 Kuh-i-Basman, volcano of, 188  
 Kuh-i-Nur, the, 52-3  
 Kuh-i-Sangi, 108  
 Kum, 6, 165, 269, 317, 325; the gold-domed shrine, 88, 205; the road to, 168; tomb of Fatima, 169; pilgrimages to, 169  
 Kurdish tribes, the, 37, 100  
 Kurratu 'l-'Ayn, poetess, 141-2  
*Kuzehs*, 103  
 Kwajah Rabi, shrine of, 112-13  
 LADGUSHT, 192  
 Lagoon, the, 6  
 Language, the Persian, 11  
 Lar river, the, 253  
 Laristan, 5  
 Law, the Persian, 61-2  
 Legations, the, Tehran, 49  
 Lent, 144  
 Leonidas, 15  
 "Lion and the Sun," emblem of the, 1, 48, 90

- Lions, 238-9  
 Literature, Persian, 284-314  
 London, route to Meshed from, 88-90  
 Louvre Museum, the, 237  
 Lur tribe, the, 34  
 Luristan, 5  
 Lustre ware, 317-18  
 Lut, the, 6-8, 185, 188, 266  
 Luft, Ali Khan, 32-3, 188  
*Lutis*, 128, 239, 281  
 Lynch and Hotz, Messrs., 234
- MACEDONIANS, THE, 17  
 Macrinus, Emperor, 20  
 Madrid Museum, example of lustre ware, 318  
 Magi, the, 21, 123, 263  
 Mahdi, 141; return of the, 134  
 Mahmud of Ghazna, Sultan, 285-6, 300  
 Mahun, village of, 186-7, 265  
 Majlis, the, 36, 138-9  
 Makran, 5, 191, 227, 269  
*Malamir*, the, 233  
 Malan range, the, 227  
 Malaria, 6, 42  
 Malcolm, Mr. "Five Years in a Persian Town," *cited*, 82, 83  
 Malcolm, Sir, John "Persian Sketches," *cited*, 51, 172, 258  
 Malik Shah, 29, 300, 301  
 Mamum, Khalif, 95  
 Man, the Persian—Position, 63-4, dress, 65-6; his ascendancy over the woman, 79; personality, 79-80; religious beliefs, 80-1; characteristics—veracity, 81-3; ingratitude, 83-4; patriotism, 85-7  
 Mani, 22  
 Manichæans, the, 22  
 Marathon, victory of, 15  
 Markham, Sir Clements, "History of Persia," *cited*, 26
- Marriage customs, 74-6, 201-6  
 Marseilles, 41  
 Maskat, 226, 228, 230; treaty with Britain, 227  
 Mashkel river, 193  
 Mausoleums, mud-built, 192  
 Mazanderan, province of, 141, 258, 287, 291, 292  
 Mecca, 26, 63, 70, 73, 136, 145; the road to, 136-7; pilgrimages, 206, 305  
 Medes, the, 39; history, 13  
 Medicine, the art of, 325, 337-40  
 Medina, 145  
*Mehalas*, 228  
 Meh'rab, the, 73  
 Meidan-i-Mashk, the, Tehran, 48  
 Meidan-i-Shah, Tehran, 49  
*Mehmankhana*, 166  
 Merv, 28, 29, 139, 301  
 Mervdasht, plain of, 270  
 Meshed, 32, 40, 49, 81, 86, 240, 267; cost of living in, 8; route from Europe, 2; customs, 51-2; the route from England, 88-90; gateways, 90; the citadel, 91; the sanctuary, 91-2; the mosque and shrine, 92-7, 135, 169; the surrounding graveyard, 97, 98; the Khiaban, 98; the bazaar, 99-100; the streets, 100, 103-5; the dervishes, 101-2; an old Seyid, 102; environs, 106-21; postal service to India, 111; the Musalla, 111; shrine of Kwajah Rabi, 112-13; sport in, 113-15; processions, 149-51, 156; Unbelievers in, 161; pilgrimages, 206; English gardens, 259; carpets, 320  
*Meshedi*, title, 206, 326  
 Mesopotamia, 321  
 Mesoud, Sultan Shah, 309  
*Minars*, 180

- Minerals, Persian, 10  
 Mirage, the, 157  
 Mirza Ali Mohammed, 141-2  
 Mirza Taki Khan, 169, 172  
 Mirza Yahya, 142  
 Missionary work in Persia, 138-9  
 Mithridates the Great, 18  
 Moawiyeh, 146-7  
*Mobeds*, 123  
*Modakhel*, 58, 59  
 Mohamera, 233  
 Mohammed, death of, 30-1, 334 ;  
     his descendants, 145-6 ; his wife,  
     200, 201  
 Mohammed Ali Shah, reign of,  
     35-8 ; the constitution revoked,  
     50 ; relations with foreign min-  
     isters, 57 ; court customs, 57-8.  
 Mohammed Shah, 34  
 Mohammedan invasion of Persia,  
     11, 19, 26-8, 124, 275-6, 299  
 Mohammedanism in Persia. *See*  
     Islamism  
 Mongol invasion of Persia, 8, 11,  
     28-30, 45, 96, 110, 116, 261, 300,  
     304, 310  
 Mongolian Steppes, the, 269  
 Monsoon, 226  
 "Moon of al Mukanna," the, 140  
 Moore, "Lalla Rookh," 139, 257  
 Moors, the, 216  
 Morieh, "Haji Baba," 87  
 Mosque of Fatima, 90-8, 169, 205  
 Mosul, 262  
 Motor-cars, 58  
 Mountains—Elburz range, 2-3, 42-3,  
     45 ; Jupa range, 186  
 Mourners, hired, 76  
*Muezzin*, the, 69, 157, 217  
 Muharram, 54, 102, 144 ; proces-  
     sions, 149-51, 156 ; ceremonies-  
     149-56 ; self-mutilation, 150 ; the  
     "Passion Play," 151-6  
 Muir, Sir William, "Life of  
     Mahomet," *cited*, 129-30, 133-4,  
     145, 208  
*Mujtehid*, 100, 135  
 Mules, Persian, 232-3  
*Mullas*, 76, 77, 78, 95, 129, 135-6,  
     151, 155, 207  
*Murdab*, the, 248  
 Murghab, plain of, 273  
 Musalla of Meshed, 39, 111  
 Music, barbaric, 49, 151 ; National,  
     282-3  
 Muzaffer-ed-Din Shah, 35, 36 ; the  
     Constitution, 50 ; customs, 57  
 Mystics. *See* Sufis  
*Nachod*, 72  
 Nadir Shah, 40, 53, 135, 172, 192 ;  
     conquests of, 31-2 ; siege of  
     Delhi, 52  
 Nagara-Khana, Tehran, 49  
 Naksh-i-Rustum, rock-tombs, 273,  
     275 ; bas-reliefs, 315  
*Nan*, 213  
 Napoleon, 227  
 Nasr-ed-Din Shah, 34-5, 36, 48, 57,  
     96, 110, 165, 169, 198, 277  
 National Assembly, 36, 138-9  
 National Council, 38  
 Nationalist party, the, 37  
 Navy, the Persian, 224  
 Nearchus, Admiral, 227  
 Nehavend, battle of, 27  
 Nejeff, 96  
 Nestorians, the, 22, 138, 235, 322 ;  
     account of, 127-9  
 New Testament, the, Mohammedan  
     attitude towards, 80  
 Niamatulla, story of, 325-30  
 Nigaristan Palace, Tehran, 49  
 Nile, the, 17  
 Nirvana, 123  
 Nishapur, 10, 29, 267, 301 ; tur-  
     quoise mines of, 118-19 ; devasta-  
     tion of, 300-1, 304

Nizami, Poet, 109, 300  
 Nizam-ul-Mulk, 29, 43-4, 300  
 No Ruz, feast of, 28, 35, 53, 102,  
 136, 271, 287  
 Nomads of Persia, 219  
 Nushirvan the Just, 24

OATH, THE PERSIAN, 81-2  
 Odessa, 38  
 "Old Man of the Mountain," 43,  
 44-5  
 Oman, Gulf of, 225  
 Omar, Khalif, 129, 146, 189; burnt  
 in effigy, 129, 148-9  
 Omar Khayyam, 29, 43; the  
*Ruba'iyat*, lines *quoted*, 243,  
 303-4; fame of, 301; grave of,  
 302; death, 302-3  
 Ophthalmia, 182  
 Opium habit, the, 213-14  
 Ormuzd, 123, 124, 125, 126  
 Orodes, King of Parthia, 18-19  
 Orthodox Christians, 128  
 Othman, 146  
 Overland route to Meshed, 89

PAHLAVI LANGUAGE, THE, 109,  
 284  
 Palms, a source of wealth, 190, 213  
 Parsis, the, 1, 122, 127, 334  
 Parthian period of Persian history,  
 17-20, 299  
 "Parthian shot," the expression, 17  
 Pasargadae, 39, 273  
 "Passion Play" in Tehran, 151-6;  
 a *resumé* of a translation, 154-6  
 Patriotism, Persian, 85  
 Payne, J., translations of Hafiz, 310  
 311, 312, 313  
 Peacock throne, the, 53  
 Peasant, the Persian, 210-13  
 Pearl fishery, the, 231, 232  
 Pelly, Sir Lewis, "The Persian  
 Miracle Play," 153-4

Persepolis, 16, 21, 39, 161, 238, 270,  
 315; destruction, 124; Porch of  
 Xerxes, 271; hall of Darius, 271;  
 Propylæa of Xerxes, 272; the  
 rock-tombs of Naksh-i-Rustum,  
 273

*Persepolis*, the, 224

Persian Gulf, the—Climate, 2-5;  
 vegetation, 5; Arab tribes of the,  
 11; the slave trade, 69, 224; the  
 peasant, 210; history, 227;  
 trade, 227-8

Persis, province of, 21

Philip of Macedon, 299

Phoenicians, the, 227

Phraates, 19

Physical features of Persia, 2-7

Pigeon-flying, 280

Pigeons, 252

*Pilau*, the, 70, 71, 213

Pilgrimages to Kum, 169; to Ker-  
 belâ, 225; women pilgrims, 206

Pir-i-Bazaar, 41

Plateau, victory of, 15

Plateau of Persia, 43; sport on the,  
 279

Polo, Marco—Travels of, 44, 128,  
 280; at Meshed, 108-9; route  
 taken by, 209, 260-7; the  
 Golden Tablet, 261; at the  
 court of Kublai Khan, 267; re-  
 turn to Venice, 267-8; the extent  
 of his work, 268-9; at Kerman,  
 278

Polvar, the, 270, 273

Pompey, 18

Population of Persia, 1, 11

Portugal, possessions in Arabia,  
 226, 228

Postal service, Persian, 35, 111

Posting in Persia, 162

Polygamy, decay of, 75, 126

Poverty, prevalence of, 7-8

Prayer, Moslem, 69-70, 73, 130-2

Precious stones, 52

Predestination, doctrine of, 130

Processions, 149-51, 156

Propylæa of Xerxes, Persepolis, 272

Protestants, 128

Proverbs, Persian, 160, 176, 196, 201, 203, 209, 219, 242, 247, 248, 251, 265, 278, 308

Punishments, national, 65, 84

*Pushtens*, 99, 268

QUAKERS, 141

Queens of Persia, 27

Quietists, 141

RAILWAYS, PERSIAN, 9, 165

Rainfall, 4

Raksh, steed of Rustum, 186, 289, 290-8

Ramazan, 54, 78, 133-6, 211

Rawlinson, Sir Henry, 6; the secret of the cuneiform writing, 275

Recitals, 155-6

Regan, 188

Renaissance, the, in Persia, 31

Reptiles, 254

Resht, rainfall, 4; description, 41-2; embroideries of, 319

Reza, *sowar*, 111

Rhé (Rhages), ruins of, 317

Rivers, Persian—Zende Rud, 3; Helmand, 6; Karun, 9; Tigris, 19

River courses, dry, 193

Roads, Persian, 9, 41, 89, 178-9

Rock-dwellings, 177

Rock-sculptures, 275, 276, 284

Rock-tombs, 273

Roman Catholics in Persia, 128, 138

Rome, attempted conquest of Parthia, 18-26

Rosary or *tasbeeh*, the, 132

Rose-water, 220

Rostov, 89

Rudbar Gate of Tus, 286

Rukh Shah, 96

Russia—Caspian fisheries, 10, 253; Persian attempts to conquer, 15; encroachments on Persia, 34; the Duma, 36; siege of Tabriz raised, 37; relations with Persia, 38, 41, 89; the gate of Meshed, 90; Russian Consulate, Meshed, 91

Rustum, adventures of, 5, 275, 289-97

*Ruzakhana*, the, 149, 155

SAADI (MUSHARRIFU'D-DIN)—Fables of, 24, 241-2; fame of, 79, 216, 304; maxims of, 196, 219, 251; the *Gulistan*, 266-7, 305-9; account of, 304-5; the *Bustan*, 306

Saba (Sava), 263

Sacrifice, Moslem, 136

Saffari dynasty, 29

St. John, Major, *cited*, 238, 254, 279

*Saiads*, 249

*Sakkas*, 149

Salamis, battle of, 15, 224

Salt deserts, 168, 171

Samarkand, 310; mosque of Timur, 317

Samanian dynasty, the, 29

*Samovars*, 99, 173

Sanabad, garden of, 96

Sand-storms, 192

*Sanjak*, 213

Sanjar, Prince, 301

Saracenic art, 28, 324

Sardar-i-Assad, the, 37, 38

Sardu, the, 269

Sasan, 21

Sasanian dynasty, the, 7, 19, 21-8, 31, 40, 50, 109

- Sattar Khan, 37  
 Satrapies, the, 17  
 Scorpions of Kashan, 171-2, 255  
 Sefavean dynasty, 31, 32, 40, 96, 140  
 Seleucia, destruction of, 20  
 Seleucidæ, the, 17, 18  
 Seleucus, General, 17  
 Self-mutilations, 150  
 "Sepulchre of the Mother of Solomon," 274  
 Servants, Persian, 67-8, 82-3, 175  
 Severus, Alexander, 21  
*Seyids*, 94, 100, 102-3, 131, 134, 207  
*Shagirds*, 162  
 Shah, the—Customs-dress, 50-51; eating, 52; the royal jewels, 52-3; feast of No Ruz, 53-4; his wives, 54-6; palaces outside Tehran, 56-7; his revenue, 211  
 Shahnama, legends of the, 123, 275  
 Shahrbanu, Princess, 154  
 Shahr-i-Jiruft, 265  
 Shaitan, 186  
*Shamal*, the, 235  
 Shapur I., capture of Valerian, 21-2, 236, 275-6; the dam at Shuster, 234, 236  
 Shapur II., 22-3  
 Shapur, city of, 275-6  
*Shar*, the, 61, 135  
 Shat-el-Arab river, 233, 262  
 Sheikhs, appearance, 229-30  
 Shemsh, 181  
 Sherley brothers, the, 260  
 Sherley, Sir Anthony, 40, 109  
 "Sherry" introduced into Spain, 216  
 Shiahs, 30-1, 44, 129, 145, 148, 189, 225  
*Shikarchi*, 178  
 AA  
 Shimr, 148, 154, 168  
 Shimran, slope of, 57  
 Shiraz, 2, 32, 40, 141, 232, 309  
     population, 11, 86; white wines of, 216; lions of, 238; beauty of, 310-11; carpets, 320  
 Shirin, Queen, 25, 109  
 Shrines, tombs of just governors, 59; Baluchistani, 189-90  
 Shughad, treachery of, 298  
 Shushan, 39, 316  
*Shushan*, the steamer, 236  
 Shuster, the irrigation dam at, 22, 24, 234, 236  
*Shuturchis*, 187  
 Siam, 269  
 Siesta, the, 221  
 Silk industry, the, 215, 263  
 Silver-work, 318  
 Sipahdar, the, 37, 38  
*Sirdabs*, 236  
 Siroes, 26  
 Sistan, province of, 5-6, 29, 294  
 Skobeleff, 88, 110  
 Slaves, Persian, 68-9, Turkoman raids, 109-10; the Gulf policed by England, 224, 229  
 Smerdis, 14  
 Smith, Sir Murdoch, *cited*, 317  
 Smyrna, bazaars, 100  
 Social conditions, poverty, 7-8; cost of living at Tehran, 8; appearance of the Irani, 11-12  
 Socrates, 122  
 Soh, 173  
 Sohrab, adventures of, 294-7  
 Solomon, King, 288; legend of, 251; throne of, 273-4  
 Solon, 124  
 Sowars, 111  
 Sparrow-hawks, 279-80  
*Sphinx*, H.M.S., 227  
 Sport, Persian, 113-15, 277-83  
 Stanley, Dean, *quoted*, 131

- Statue, antique, single example, 276
- Stevenson, R. L., *quoted*, 159
- Stoddart, 261
- Stork, the, 249
- Story-tellers, public, 98
- Sufism, 140-1, 312
- Seelabs*, 193
- Sultanabad, 320
- Sumatra, 269
- Sun, the emblem, 3, 216-7
- Sunnis, 30-1, 113, 129, 189, 225, 306
- Superstition, Persian, 325-40
- Susa, 236, 237; palace of Darius, 316
- Sykes, Major, "Ten Thousand Miles in Persia," *cited*, 108, 119, 189, 227, 262, 263, 269; "Pill-grimage," *cited*, 302; his Persian collection, 317
- TABRIZ, 35, 40, 41, 180; siege of, 1908, 36; colleges, 61; the citadel, 88; trade of, 262
- Taft, village of, 178, 179
- Takht*, 221
- Takht-i-Jamshid, 270
- Takht-i-rawan*, 206
- Takht-i-Suleiman, 273-4
- Takht-i-Taous, throne of, 53
- Tak-i-Bostan, 276
- Tamerlane, 128
- Tamineh, Princess, 293-4, 295, 297
- Tarantulas, 255
- Tartar invasion of Persia, 30
- Tartars of Timur, 28
- Tartary, fire-worship in, 123
- Tavernier, 260
- Taxation, 59
- Taziehs*, Persian, 151-6
- Tchai-khanas*, 98
- Tea-shops, Persian, 98
- Tehran, 33, 35, 37, 40, 142, 263; journey from Europe, 2, 41-5; cost of living at, 8; description, 45-6; roads, 46; the rainy season, 46-7; bazaars, 47-8; monuments, 48; the Legations, 48-9; the Nigaristan, 49; the Meidan-i-Shah, 49; the Shah's palace, 52-6; environs, 56-8; education in, 61; *Gabrs*, 122; the "Passion Play," 151-6; a journey from, 163, *et seq.*; the British Minister, 253; English gardens in, 259; horse-racing in, 280
- Tekké, Turkomans of, carpets made by, 321, 322
- Telegraph communication, 9-10, 35
- Thales, 124
- Thermopylæ, pass of, defence, 15
- "Three Wise Men," the, 263
- Threshing, 215
- Tibet, 269
- Ticks, 170, 256-7
- Tiflis, 41
- Tigers, 239
- Tigris, the, 19, 227, 233
- Tiles, enamelled, 171, 183, 316-17
- Timur the Lame, 30, 310; mosque at Samarkand, 317
- Tipcat, 281
- Togrul the Seljuk, 29
- Tombs of Bahrein, 231-2
- Towers of Silence, 126, 181
- Trade routes, 262
- Trading customs, 47, 48
- Trajan, 20
- Transcaspia, 88
- Transcaspian Railway, 89-90
- Transcaucasian Railway, 88
- Travelling, modes of, 162-3; suitable outfit, 163-4
- Tripoli, 305
- True Cross, the, mention of, 25



- Tuesday, Zoroastrian observance of, 127  
*Tufangchis*, 160  
 Tup Meidan, the, Tehran, 48  
 Turanians, the, 14, 99  
 Turkish invasion of Persia, 29  
 Turkoman raids, 100, 109-10, 245, 300; Massacre at Geok Tepé, 88, 110; Turkomans utilised for the postal service, 111  
 Turquoise, the, 52, 63, 118-19; mines of Nishapur, 10, 118-19  
 Tus, 29, 95, 96, 98, 285-6; shrine of Imam Reza, 116-17; tomb of Firdawsi, 117-18; reduction of, 304  
  
*URF*, the, 61  
 Urumiah, Lake, 123  
 Urumiah, Nestorians of, 128  
 Uzbegs, the, 11, 96  
  
 VALERIAN, EMPEROR, 21-2, 236, 275-6  
 Vali Ahd, the, 41  
 "Valley of the Angel of Death," 168; story of, 325-30  
 Vambéry, Prof., "Life and Adventures," *cited*, 93, 109, 120-1  
 Vegetation of Persia, 5, 258  
 Venice, 228, 260  
 Vespasian, Emperor, 20  
 Vienna, 89  
 Village, the Persian, 57, 216-17  
 Vine, culture of the, 216  
 Vishtaspa, King, 123  
 Volcano—Demavend, 2, 45; Kuh-i-Basman, 188  
 Vultures, 181, 250  
  
 WATER, VALUE OF, IN PERSIA, 49, 222  
 Wills, Dr. "Persia as it is," *cited*, 215; "Land of the Lion and the Sun," *cited*, 256, 280  
  
 Winds, the *bad-i-sud-i-bist rus*, 6  
 Windsor Castle, 57  
 Wine industry, the, 216  
 Wives of the Shah, 54-6; temporary wives, 95  
 Wolves, 240  
 Woman in Persia—Treatment of the European woman, 47; the Shah's wives, 54-6; dress, 56, 198-200; punishment for crime, 62; her social position, 63-4; marriage, 74-5, 201-6; her position in the house, 75-6; paradise, 78-9; *Sigels*, 95; Zoroastrian women, 126-7; effect of Islamism on her position, 129-30, 137, 169, 208-9; under Babism, 143; at the "Passion Play," 151-2; the woman of Baluchistan, 189; proverbs concerning, 196; the girl's education, 197; seclusion of, 197-8; the day's occupation, 200; origin of the veiling of, 200-201; her anxiety to have a son, 204-5; burial customs, 207-8; village women, 218; Nomad women, 219  
 Wrestling, 281  
  
 XENOPHON, 64  
 Xeres, wine industry of, 216  
 Xerxes of Persia, 15; his navy, 224; Persepolis, 271-2  
  
 YAZDIGIRD III., 27  
 Yezd, 7, 138, 141, 262, 263, 269, *Gabrs*, 122; the fire temple, 125, 126; Babism in, 143; the Desert City, 177-81; limestone cliffs, 179; Zoroastrians of, 179, 180-1; Towers of Silence, 181; Marco Polo's visit, 263-4  
 Yezdikhist, village of, 177  
 Yezid, Khalif, 147-8

Yule, Sir Henry, "Marco Polo,"  
*cited*, 262, 268-9

ZABULISTAN, 295

Zainab, 154

Zal, 291

Zanjan, 141

Zeid, his wife, 200

Zend dynasty, 32, 40

Zendah Rud, the, 3

Zil-i-Sultan, the, 55, 176

Zohak, King, 27, 288-9

Zoroastrianism—First converts, 13;  
 stamped out in Persia, 20-2, 28;  
 an account of, 122-7; death of  
 Zoroaster, 124; restrictions on  
 Zoroastrians, 126-7; the symbol  
 of the sun, 216-17; burial cus-  
 toms, 273

Zoroastrians of Bombay, 1; of Yezd,  
 179, 180-1; of Kerman, 185

Zulfakar, the sword, 135

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HOWARD.  
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THE PATTEN EXPERIMENT.  
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CHILDREN OF THE MIST.

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THE RIVER.

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